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N.E. Ross
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1936

HATHERCOURT RECTORY.

VOL. II.

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HATHERCOURT RECTORY.

BY

MRS. MOLESWORTH

("ENNIS GRAHAM")

AUTHOR OF

"THE CUCKOO CLOCK," "CARROTS,"
&c., &c.

"Dans mon cœur il n'y a pas d'amour,
Mais il y en aura quelque jour."

Breton Song.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1878.

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LONDON :
PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE.
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

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CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A CUL-DE-SAC	1
II. "HAVE I MADE IT WORSE?"	32
III. A TEMPTING OPPORTUNITY	54
IV. MR. CHEVIOTT'S ULTIMATUM	83
V. "DOING" ROMARY	113
VI. THE HAUNTED ROOM	142
VII. MARY TELLS STORIES	171
VIII. WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PRIMROSE LANE.	199
IX. COALS OF FIRE	228
X. AN ENFORCED ARMISTICE.	257
XI. PLEDGED	283

Bridges 35.

30th 51

Gen. Rev. Ray



823

M 73h

1878a

v. 2

HATHERCOURT RECTORY.

CHAPTER I.

A CUL-DE-SAC.

“ it became a proverb, when what ought to be your election was forced upon you, to say, ‘Hobson’s choice.’ ”—*Spectator*. No. 509.

THERE was silence in the Romary carriage too as it made its way home, with considerably more speed than the Withenden fly, after the ball. It had been arranged that Mr. Cheviott and his sister were not to return to Cleavelands that evening, but to drive straight back to Ro-

mary, and it had been arranged, too, that Captain Beverley should accompany them. Arthur would not, on the whole, have been sorry to upset this plan, but there was no help for it. As to how much, or how little of his conduct in the ball-room, had been observed by his cousins, he was in ignorance, and he fancied that he did not care. He told himself that he had acted with deliberate intention, that it was best to bring matters to a crisis, and have done at all costs with the restraint which of late he had found so unendurable; but in so speaking to himself he was not stating the real facts of the case. From first to last his behaviour to Lilius Western had been the result of no reflection or consideration; he had never fairly looked his position in the face, and made up his mind as to what he was justified in doing, or how far he had a right to go; he had simply

yielded to the charm of her society, and thrown care to the winds, trusting, like a child, that somehow or other things would come right—something would “turn up.”

And it was the secret consciousness of the defencelessness of such conduct that made him uneasy in Mr. Cheviott's presence, and made him dread the explanation which he now fully realised must shortly take place between them.

Alys's mood, as respects the Western sisters, was, as has been seen, verging on the defiant. Yet a quick sensitiveness to the unexpressed state of feelings of her two companions warned her that, at present, any allusion to the subject was best avoided.

“I will stand by Arthur if he is in earnest,” she said to herself, resolutely, “and were Laurence twenty times over my elder brother I would *not* support him

in any narrow-minded piece of class prejudice, or interference with Arthur's right to please himself. But if I am to do any good I must first be sure that Arthur *is* in earnest, and, till then, I had better take care how I irritate Laurence by meddling."

So Alys cogitated, lying back in her corner of the carriage, and saying nothing.

Suddenly Mr. Cheviott's voice roused her; to her surprise he spoke very cheerfully.

"Well, Alys, are you very tired? I think it was a mistake of the Cleaves to have that carpet dance last night. It prevented our feeling as fresh as might have been the case to-night."

"Yes," said Alys, "I think it was. But I did not feel tired, except just at first, and then I was all right again."

"Carpet dances are *always* a mistake," observed Captain Beverley, rousing him-

self with some effort to join in the conversation. "People talk rubbish about their being more 'enjoyable'—what an odious word 'enjoyable' is!—than any others, but it's all nonsense. They take more out of one than twenty balls."

"I don't think last night could have taken much out of you, Arthur. You danced so little—not half as much as to-night," said Alys, thoughtlessly.

"No," said Mr. Cheviott, markedly, "not a quarter as much, I should say."

Arthur said nothing, and Alys, feeling rather guilty, tried to lead the conversation into safer channels. In this she might not have succeeded had not her brother done his best to help her. But Arthur remained silent, and all three were glad when at last the long drive was over and the carriage turned in at the Romary gates.

"Good night, Alys," said Mr. Cheviott

at once, and Alys obediently kissed him and said good night.

“Good night, Arthur,” she said, lingeringly. She felt so sorry for Arthur somehow; she would so have liked to have seen him by himself for a few minutes.

“Good night, dear,” he replied, but without any of his usual sunny brightness. And Alys felt sure she heard him sigh, as, in accordance with Mr. Cheviott’s suggestion that they might as well have a cigar before going to bed, he followed his cousin into the library.

“Laurence is going to give him a ‘talking to,’ as the boys say,” thought Alys, as she went slowly upstairs. “And what has he done to deserve it, and why should he submit to it? Unless, indeed, he is *not* in earnest, and only amusing himself, and that Laurence knows it—but I’m sure it is not that. I cannot understand Arthur.

I have never before thought him wanting in spirit."

But the more she reflected, the more puzzled she grew, so Alys, not being deficient in common sense, decided that she could do no good by sitting up and tiring herself. She undressed and went to bed, and to sleep ; but, though not a principal in the drama which was being enacted in her sight, her dreams that night were scarcely less disturbed and troubled than those of another even more intensely interested spectator, eight or nine miles off. On the whole, *Lilias's* sleep that night was far more peaceful than that of her sister Mary, or of Alys Cheviott.

For *Lilias's* heart was full of faith and hope, and to such dreamers there come no uneasy visions.

Mr. Cheviott led the way through the library into his own private sitting-room

beyond. The fire had been carefully attended to, and was blazing brightly ; the room looked a picture of comfort. Many and many a time Arthur would have liked nothing better than an hour's *tête-à-tête* over their pipes with his cousin—the cousin who, to him, represented father and brother in one—to whom he owed all that he had ever known of “home” and its saving associations, “all the good that was in him,” as he himself had often expressed it, for Laurence’s care and affection for the boy had been great, and he had exerted them wisely. He had won Arthur’s confidence and respect ; he had never so acted as to cause him to fret and chafe under what, in less judicious hands, he might have been made to feel an unnatural authority.

And not a small part of Captain Beverley’s present discomfort arose from the

consciousness of having deeply disappointed his cousin. He told himself he had done no wrong, but he knew he had, thoughtlessly and impulsively, done that, or been on the point of doing that, which would greatly add to the difficulties and perplexities of a life much of which had been devoted to his welfare.

And acknowledging even thus much, where was the gratitude he had so often expressed ?

He made no effort to conceal his gloom. He sat down on the first chair that came in his way, he muttered something about his pipe being upstairs, "not unpacked," and declined the cigar which his cousin hospitably offered him in its stead. Mr. Cheviott quietly filled and lighted his own pipe, drew his chair to the fire, with even more deliberation than usual, for his cousin's demeanour somewhat disconcerted him.

He would have found it easier to go on with what he had to do, had Arthur continued indifferent or even defiant. But it is hard to strike a man that is down; it is extremely difficult to "lecture" or remonstrate with a man who is evidently more disgusted with himself than you can possibly be with him. For Laurence knew that Arthur was genuinely distressed and suffering; he knew his cousin to be as incapable of sulky or resentful temper as of dissimulation or intentional treachery.

"Arthur," he said, at last, after smoking for a minute or two in silence, "I wish you wouldn't look so unlike yourself; it makes it harder for me. You must have known that this sort of thing couldn't go on—that you were running wilfully into an entanglement which, sooner or later, must necessitate an explanation with me.

You have no right to punish *me* for your own acts by looking as you are doing. Now the time has come to have it out with me, there is only one thing to do—face it.”

“I am perfectly ready to face it,” said Arthur, coldly, but with a decided and sudden increase of colour in his cheeks, and sitting up erectly on his chair.

“So much the better,” said Laurence, drily, adding to himself, “I am glad I have roused him; we shall understand each other now. I was going,” he continued, aloud—“I was *going* to have prefaced what I have to say by asking you whether you are losing your senses or your honour and high principle, for except by supposing one or the other I cannot, considering all, explain the way you have been going on. I was *going* to say so, I say, but I don’t now think I need, for I

see you think as badly of yourself as I could do."

"I do nothing of the kind," replied Arthur, firing up. "I don't ask you to tell me how badly you think of me—you could hardly infer worse than you have already expressed—but I altogether deny that I am either mad or bad, to put it shortly. And, what's more, I have done nothing to justify you, or anyone, in speaking of me as you have done."

"You can't mention 'me' and 'anyone' together," said Mr. Cheviott, coolly. "I am the only person living, except a lawyer or two, who understands your position, therefore I am the only person who can judge whether you are doing right or wrong in making love to a girl without letting her perfectly comprehend what you have to offer her."

"And how do you know that I have not

put it all before her?" exclaimed Arthur, fiercely still.

"Because you could not do so without breaking your word," said Mr. Cheviott, "and because, too, no girl who understood your position would encourage your suit. If she were a high-principled, unselfish girl, she would not allow you to ruin yourself for her sake, and if she were a calculating, selfish girl, she would have no wish to share your ruin."

"Yes," said Arthur, bitterly, "you put it very neatly. I am regularly caught in a net, I know. Whichever way I turn, it is equally ruinous."

"Then what on earth did you run your head into the net for?" said Mr. Cheviott, impatiently. "You had your eyes open, you knew what you were about."

"I did *not*," said Arthur, "I never, till now, realised how unnatural and unbear-

able my position was. But you misunderstand me—I mean that my father's absurd will entangles me hopelessly—I was not alluding to my—my acquaintance with Miss Western—that is to be blamed for nothing but causing me to realise the truth.”

“Well, then, I wish you had not realised the truth,” said Mr. Cheviott. “I think, Arthur, you forget strangely that in all this you are not the only sufferer. Do you think *my* position is a pleasant one?”

“No,” said Captain Beverley, “I don’t, but I think you exaggerate matters. In any case, there is no question of my *ruining* myself, or anyone else.”

“How do you make that out? For by ‘any case’ I suppose you mean in the case of your proposing to Miss Western and her accepting you (you may have done so already, for all I know), and your marriage

following. I don't think ruin is much too strong a word to use for what this would bring upon you?"

"You forget Hathercourt," said Captain Beverley, with some hesitation.

"Hathercourt," repeated Mr. Cheviott, looking puzzled. "I don't know what you mean."

"The Edge. Hathercourt Edge—my farm, I mean," explained Arthur, still with a sort of hesitation in his manner.

Mr. Cheviott turned upon him with more asperity than he had yet shown.

"Really, Arthur, you are too foolish," he exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that you could live at the Edge on about fifty pounds a year—certainly not more—for the interest of the money that was raised to pay your debts three years ago would fully take the rest of the two or three hundred a year that is the most you could

make out of the farm, even if you managed it far better than you are likely to do. And I have no power to clear you from these debts out of what should be, what surely will be, your own before very long?" he looked at Arthur anxiously as he spoke.

"If it's ever becoming mine depends upon the marriage that my father set his heart on taking place, it never will be mine——"

"But——" began Mr. Cheviott.

"Yes, yes, I know what you are going to say. I may change, you think, as I have changed before, but I never shall, Laurence. I never was really in earnest before—my flirtations, even you must allow, were very harmless; *this* is very different, and I cannot give it up. And—and even if I have to go away for two years—till Alys is of age—and take my chance of *her* remembering me, I could

not owe my inheritance to a legal quibble—I could not go through the farce of asking Alys to marry me, even though *sure* of her refusal, when I was heart and soul devoted to another. And even if she—Miss Western—were married to some other fellow by that time, it would be no better. I could not marry anyone else; and even if I could, as far as my feelings went, I could not, in honour, refrain from telling Alys all, and——” he stopped to take breath.

“Well, what then?” said Mr. Cheviott.

“Could I insult Alys by asking her to accept me *without* my caring for her as she should be cared for? As I now know, I never could care for her, for she is just like the dearest of sisters to me, but *only* that.”

Mr. Cheviott smiled.

“Why in the world did you not see all

this two years ago, when you persuaded me into agreeing to your selling out and setting you straight again? Do you not remember how confident you were about never wanting to marry anyone else?"

"Anyone at all, you should say. I never realised the marrying Alys. I was sure *she* would not wish it, and that seemed to make it all safe; but I never, in the faintest degree, imagined my caring for anyone in *this* way—a way which makes it simply impossible to think of ever marrying anyone else."

"You think so just now," observed Mr. Cheviott, cynically, "but——"

"No, it is no passing feeling—you misjudge me altogether, Laurence; you seem quite unable to understand me, and therefore there's no more to be said."

"I don't see that—even supposing I am incapable of understanding your present

frame of mind—though being in love, you must allow, is not such a very uncommon condition as you seem to think it ; taking for granted, however, that I cannot understand you, still the practical side of the question has to be considered, and you have no one to consult but me. In two words, what do you mean to do ?”

Arthur turned his face away for a moment ; then he set his elbows on his knees and leant his head on his hands, staring gloomily into the fire.

At last, “Laurence,” he broke out, “I don’t know *what* to do. There, now you have it all ; you may despise and sneer at me as you like, I can’t help it. I deserve it, and yet I *don’t* deserve it, but that’s the long and the short of it. I do not, in the very least, know what to do, or what is right to do.”

To his surprise, Mr. Cheviott suddenly

leant forward, took his pipe out of his mouth, and held out his hand. Half mechanically Arthur took it, and Laurence grasped his cousin's hand warmly.

"We shall understand each other now," he said, heartily. "When it comes to wishing to do right *now*, whatever mistakes you may have made before, we come upon firm ground. Shall I tell you, Arthur, what seems to me the only thing for you do?"

"What?" said Arthur, listlessly.

"Go away—quite away, for two years at least, if not more."

"But not without explaining the reason to—to the Westerns?" said Captain Beverley, looking up quickly.

"Explaining!" repeated Mr. Cheviott, with a shade of contempt in his tone, "what in this world could you explain? Think of the position you would put the

girl in by letting her understand the real state of the case! What *could* she say or do? Her promising to wait for you would be ruin to you, and her throwing you over, should you distinctly propose to her, would seem to her—if she be what you believe her—shameful. I suppose you have *not* done anything definite? You are not engaged to her?”

“No,” said Arthur, reluctantly. “She couldn’t exactly bring me up for breach of promise, if that’s what you think her capable of,” he went on, with a half bitter laugh; “but I consider myself *more* bound to her than if we were engaged. Then I should have given her a right to assert herself, then she could insist on my explaining myself. My going away, as you propose, Laurence, seems to me the meanest, most dishonourable attempt at sneaking out of the whole affair—and, good

Heavens, what will they think of me?"

"Hardly so badly as they will think of *me*," thought Mr. Cheviott, while a vision of the pale indignation of Mary Western's honest face flashed before his eyes. But he said nothing.

"Laurence, I say, what *will* they think of me?" repeated Arthur, impatiently.

Mr. Cheviott, took his pipe out of his mouth again, and, in his turn, stared into the fire.

"It can't be helped; it's the only thing to do," he replied, decidedly.

Captain Beverley got up and walked excitedly up and down the room.

"What will Alys, even, think of me?" he exclaimed. "She knows enough to suspect more. Laurence, is there nothing—are you certain there is nothing that can be done to get me out of this cursed complication? Would there be no use in

getting another opinion upon the will?"

Mr. Cheviott shook his head.

"None whatever. You know that as well as I do," he replied. "There is only one thing that would free you."

"What?" exclaimed Captain Beverley, eagerly, stopping short and facing his cousin.

"Alys's death," said Mr. Cheviott.

Arthur shuddered.

"For shame, Laurence," he said, angrily. "Do you think it's good taste, or good feeling either, to sneer in that way when you must—when you cannot but see what all this is to me?"

"It is not *pleasant* to myself," observed Mr. Cheviott, "which never seems to occur to you, as I said before. My allusion to Alys's death should remind you of this. As things are, nothing—really nothing else than the death of the creature

dearest to me on earth can clear *me* from the odious position I am placed in."

Arthur looked at his cousin, first with surprise—it was so seldom Laurence talked of himself or his own feelings—then gradually with a dawning of sympathy in his kindly eyes.

"Laurence!" he exclaimed, softly. That was all, and for a few moments there was silence.

"Did no one know of what my father was doing when he made that insane codicil? Could no one have prevented it—he was with your father at the time?" said Arthur, presently.

"No one knew of it," replied Mr. Cheviott, "not even his own lawyer; he must have had a consciousness that it would be disapproved of. I think the idea of saving you from the sort of marriage he had made himself had become a monomania

with him—that, and the wish to repay to his sister's child, in some way, what she had done for him. He knew little Alys would not be rich (her coming into Aunt Bethune's money was never thought of then), and he was so extraordinarily fond of the child."

"Couldn't he have left her half his money unconditionally?"

"I wish he had—*now*," said Laurence.

"But what do you mean by a wish to repay to his sister what she had done for him?"

"You know surely that my mother made over nearly all she had to him? Long ago, before your uncle's death gave him Lydon and all his money. He was foolish as a young man, foolish and desperately extravagant, and but for what my mother did to save him, I don't believe

Lydon would ever have been his. His brother was just the sort of man to have passed him over, had there been any sort of disgrace."

"What an unlucky set we have been!" said Arthur.

"And then he finished up by that wretched marriage," pursued Laurence, without noticing his cousin's remark, "and in that again my mother was the only one to stand by him. He had reason enough for gratitude to her, if only he had taken a different way of showing it."

"Does Alys know *anything* of all this?" asked Arthur.

"*Nothing*; and she never must. It has been my great aim to prevent it. *However* things turn out, she must never know. You see that, Arthur, surely? I can depend upon you?" said Mr. Cheviott, speaking

more eagerly and vehemently than he had yet done.

“You have my promise; what more would you have?” replied Arthur, regretfully. “Yes,” he continued, after a pause, “I suppose it would never do for her to know, but it is frightful to think how she will misjudge me—almost as bad as to think of the others. Laurence,” he went on, “I must do one thing—I must write to say good-bye to Mrs. Western; they have been awfully kind to me—at least, I may say I am *obliged* to go away.”

Mr. Cheviott smiled grimly.

“I am to have my full share of the credit of this nice piece of work, I see,” he said to himself. “Well, so best, perhaps.”—“Oh, yes, I suppose you must say something of the kind,” he added, aloud, and at these words Arthur felt a slight

sensation of relief. What might he not contrive to say by *not* saying, in this note he had obtained permission to write? What might not Liliás, as clear-headed as she was true-hearted, Liliás, clairvoyante with "the eyes of the mind," read between the lines of this poor little note on which so much was to hang? Yes, for a minute or two Arthur felt a shade less hopelessly wretched.

"Laurence," he said, after a little pause, and with some energy in his tone, "you will not, at least, coerce me in any way as to where or how I spend these two years?"

"How do you mean?" said Mr. Cheviott, cautiously, with perhaps even a shade of suspiciousness in his tone. But Arthur did not resent, if he perceived it; he looked up into his cousin's face, and somehow the sight of his own pled more in his

favour than any words. All the comeliness and colour, all the boyish heartiness, seemed to have faded away out of his features as if by magic; in their stead there was a pale, almost haggard look of anxiety which touched Mr. Cheviott inexpressibly. He turned away uneasily.

"It's altogether too bad," he muttered to himself; "it is altogether wrong. Here am I made to feel almost as if it were all *my* doing, and Arthur with all the heart and spirit crushed out of him, poor fellow! And, after all, he has not done anything wrong—all the result of his father's folly; it is altogether too bad. Far better have left him penniless from the beginning."

But Mr. Cheviott was not in the habit of allowing his feelings, however righteous, to run away with him. In a moment or two he replied quietly to his cousin's question.

"I have no wish to coerce you about anything," he said, weariedly; "I only want to decide how to make the best of a bad business. Where would you like to go?"

"*Like* to go? Nowhere," said Arthur, bitterly. "Where I would have a chance of doing any good is the question. I was thinking I might do worse than take to studying farming, and that sort of thing, systematically—go to Cirencester or one of those agricultural colleges, eh?"

"With a view to settling down at the Edge?" said Laurence, maliciously.

"No, but with a view to getting an agency—the agency of an estate, I mean, once Alys is of age. I don't see anything unreasonable in that. If Alys doesn't sell Lydon, perhaps she will take me into consideration."

"Don't sneer, Arthur; it is not Alys's

fault," said Mr. Cheviott. "I don't think your idea is an unreasonable one," and relieved to find his cousin so practically inclined, he went on to discuss the rival merits of the various agricultural colleges.

It was daylight, or dawn, at least, before the cousins separated, but, tired as he was, Captain Beverley did not go to bed till he had written and re-written half a dozen times the conceded note of farewell to Mrs. Western.

And in the end he, in despair, copied over the first and decided to send it.

"It is merely catching at a straw," he said to himself. "Far better give up every hope of her at once, but I *cannot*."

He left Romary the following afternoon, but his note was not sent to Hathercourt Rectory till late that evening.

CHAPTER II.

“HAVE I MADE IT WORSE?”

“Give me good fortune, I could strike him dead,
For this discomfort he hath done the house!”

ELAINE.

SO it was not really far from the “this time to-morrow” that Liliás had so confidently anticipated, when Mrs. Western opened the envelope, addressed to her by Captain Beverley, and read its contents.

“What can it mean? I cannot understand,” she said to herself, tremulously, for she was alone at the time. Then a second thought struck her, and the tremu-

lousness gave place to hot indignation.

“Can he have been playing with her only? My child—my poor Liliás, is it *possible?*” she exclaimed aloud, in her agitation. “What shall I do? How can I tell her?”

Just then a light, firm step sounded along the passage. Mrs. Western shivered.

“If it is Liliás!” she whispered.

But it was not Liliás.

“Oh, Mary, my dearest, how thankful I am it is you!” she cried, as her second daughter entered the room. “Mary, what does this mean? Read it. How can we ever tell Liliás?” and as she spoke she held out the paper that trembled in her hands.

Mary trembled too, for an instant only, however. Then she drew herself together, as it were, by a vigorous effort, and read—

“Romary, February 19th.

“MY DEAR MRS. WESTERN,

“I hardly know how to find words in which to apologise sufficiently for the ingratitude and discourtesy of which I shall *appear* guilty when I tell you that this note is to bid you all good-bye. For a time only, I trust and believe, but a time which seems terribly long for me to look forward to—for I am absolutely obliged to leave this neighbourhood at once, and for *two years*. I do not know how to thank you for all your goodness. I have never, in all my life, been so happy as under your roof, yet I have no choice but to go, without even bidding you all farewell in person.

“Will you think of me as kindly as you can, and will you *allow* me to send, through you, my farewell to Miss West-

ern and her sisters, and the rest of the family ? and believe me,

“Yours most gratefully and truly,

“ARTHUR KENNETH BEVERLEY.”

Mary stood motionless. Her face grew pale, her lips compressed, but she did not speak.

“What does it mean ? Mary, speak, child, tell me what it means,” said Mrs. Western, with the petulance born of extreme anxiety. “It cannot be that Lilius has refused him ?”

“No, mother, it is not that,” said Mary, “I wish it were.”

“What is it, then ? *Can* he be so utterly base and dishonourable ?”

“Not of himself,” replied Mary, bitterly ; “weak fool that he is, he is not so bad as that. No, mother, he is not, or has been

made to think he is not, his own master; it is all that man—that *bad* man's doing."

"*Whose* doing?" said Mrs. Western, bewilderedly.

"That Mr. Cheviott—Mr. Cheviott of Romary. Don't you see the note is dated from there? I see it all; he found it out at the ball. Very likely he went there for the purpose of finding it out, having heard rumours of it, and at once used all his influence, whatever it is, to make that poor fool give it up. And yet he *isn't* a poor fool! That is the worst of it; there is so much good in him, and Lilies cares for him—yes, *that* is the worst of it. Mother, she does care for him. Will it break her heart?"

And Mary, in her innocence and ignorance, looked up to the mother who had gone through life, who must know how it

would be, and repeated, wistfully, "Mother, will it break her heart?"

Mrs. Western shook her head.

"I do not know—I cannot say; she is so proud. Either it will harden or break her utterly. Oh, Mary, my dear, my instincts were right. Do you remember how I dreaded it from the first?"

"Yes, mother, you were right; now-a-days if people are poor, they must forget they are gentlepeople. It would be well to bring up Alexa and Josey not to 'look high,' as the servants say; a respectable tradesman—Mr. Brunt, the Withenden draper's eldest son, for instance, is the sort of man that girls like us should be taught to encourage—eh, mother?"

"Mary, don't; you pain me. It is not like you to talk so. If what you say *were* true, it would make me go back upon it all and think I was wrong to marry your

father. He might have done so much better—he, so attractive and popular as he was ; he might have married some one rich and——”

“Hush, mother—*dear* mother, hush,” said Mary, kissing her ; “it is wicked of me to pain you,” and in saying these words she determined to tell her mother nothing of her own personal part of the affair, her bitter indignation at the way in which Mr. Cheviott had tried to win her over to take part against her sister ; and for this reticence she had another, as yet hardly understood, motive—a terrible misgiving was creeping upon her. Was *she* to blame ? Had her plainly expressed defiance and indignation roused Mr. Cheviott to more decisive action than he had before contemplated ? She could not tell.

“But so mean as he has shown himself, it is perfectly possible that it is so,” she

reflected. "He is small-minded enough to be stung into doing what he has by even my contempt, yet how could I have spoken otherwise ? though for Liliás's sake I could *almost* have made a hypocrite of myself."

But as yet she was not at leisure to think this over ; she only felt instinctively that it was better it should not be told, and thus deciding, her mother's voice recalled her to the present.

"Mary," she repeated again, "how are we to tell Liliás ?"

"Leave it to me, mother dear," she replied, for a moment's consideration satisfied her that nothing in the shape of sympathy or pity—not even her mother's—was likely to be acceptable to her sister at the first.

"She may soften afterwards, but she is sure to be hard at first," Mary said to herself, "and, dear mother," she went on,

aloud, "the less notice we seem to take of his going, to the others, the better, don't you think? Not even to papa. If he sees Lily looking much the same as usual—and you may trust her to do that—he will not think anything about it, and Alexa and Josey must just be well snubbed if they begin any silly chatter. And you will leave Liliās to me?"

"Yes, dear; but can I do nothing? If we could arrange for her to go away somewhere for a while, for instance?"

"After a time, perhaps, but not at first. Mother, you will try not to take *any* notice of it at first, won't you? Just allude to it in a common-place way; it will be far the best and easiest for Liliās."

"Yes, I understand."

"It is so horrible!" said Mary, with a little shudder, "so utterly *horrible* that a girl should be exposed to this—that even

you and I, mother—mother and sister though we are to her, should be discussing her feelings as if we were doctors and she a patient ! Oh, it is *horrible* !”

Lilias was not in her room ; she was downstairs in the drawing-room practising duets with Alexa, while Josey hovered about chattering, and interrupting, and trying to extract gossip from her elder sister on the subject of last night’s ball.

“ Josey,” said Mary, as she came in, “ it is past your bedtime, and you, too, Alexa, had better go, I think. Mamma is in the study, so go and say good night to her there.”

“ Is mother not coming in here again ?” asked Lilias. “ I hate the evenings papa has to go out ; we all seem so unsettled and straggling. Yes, do go to bed, children. I am beginning to feel a little tired, Mary ; aren’t you ?”

“No—yes, a little. I really don’t know,” said Mary.

Lilias laughed merrily.

“Why, I believe you are half asleep, child!” she exclaimed. “We are evidently not intended to be fine ladies, if one ball knocks us up so. I wonder what all the people who were there last night are doing with themselves now? Very likely they are having carpet dances to-night, and all sorts of fun. The Cleavelands party is broken up, though. The Cheviotts were going back to Romary last night.”

“Yes,” said Mary.

“No note has come for me, I suppose?” asked Lilias, with a little hesitation. “I did not like to ask you before the girls, but one of them said something about a groom on horseback having

been at the stable door a little while ago."

"There was no note for you," said Mary, her voice sounding even to herself set and hard, "but there was one for mamma. She told me to bring it to you. Here it is."

Lilias took it, but something in Mary's manner startled her.

"What is it?" she said, hastily. "Why do you look so strange, Mary?"

"Read the note, Lily, please," said Mary. "I'm going back to mamma—I won't be a minute," and as she spoke she turned to leave the room.

"Don't go, Mary!" cried Lilias, but Mary had already gone.

Ten minutes after she returned to the drawing-room, but no Lilias was there. Mary's heart failed her.

"Was I wrong to leave her?" she said

to herself. "I thought it would be so horrid for me to seem to be watching how she took it."

She flew upstairs to her sister's bedroom. The door was shut, but not locked. Mary knocked.

"Come in," said Liliás's voice, and hardly knowing what she was going to see, Mary entered.

There stood Liliás in the centre of the room, her beautiful fair hair all loosened, hanging about her like a cloud, her face pale, but her eyes very bright—brighter than usual, it seemed to Mary.

"Lily!" she exclaimed.

"Why do you say 'Lily,' and look at me like that?" replied [her sister, sharply. "There's nothing the matter. I'm tired, and going to bed early, that's all. Please tell mamma so, and do ask her not to come to say good night to me. No, don't

kiss me, please, Mary. I'm cross, I suppose. Just say good night."

"Very well," said Mary, submissively.

She turned sadly to go, but had not reached the door when her sister's voice recalled her.

"Oh ! Mary," it cried, and the sharp accent of pain which rang through the two little words went straight to Mary's heart, "don't misunderstand me. I want to be unselfish and brave, and just now it seemed to me that, if anyone seemed to feel for me, I could not manage to get on. But I don't want to make *you* unhappy, and you may talk to me if you like."

Mary gently closed the door, then she came back to her sister, and drew her down on to a seat.

"What am I to say, Lily ? I wish I knew."

"Anything," replied Lilius—"you may

say *anything*, Mary, except one thing."

"And what is that?"

"Blame of *him*," said Lillas, her eyes sparkling, "that, Mary, is the one thing I could not bear. I have made up my mind absolutely about this—if—if it is *never* explained, I will still keep to it, he is, in some way, not his own master."

"But if it is so, Lillas, it still does not free him from blame, though it alters the kind. If he is not his own master, he should not have let himself get to care for you, and, still worse, have taught you to care for him."

"Oh! yes, I daresay that is true enough—at least, it sounds so," said Lillas; "but in some way or other it isn't true, though I can't explain it, and can't argue about it. Besides, Mary," she went on, with some hesitation, her pale face flushing crimson as she spoke, "it isn't as if he had said

good-bye for ever. He says distinctly, 'two years.'

"Ah! yes, and that is *the* mean bit of it," said Mary, indignantly, "he had no right to allude to any future at all. He should leave you absolutely free, if he cannot claim you openly—leave you, I mean, absolutely free for those two years, even if he really expects to be able to return at their end. What right has he to expect you to waste your youth and happiness for him? If you were engaged, a separation of two years would be nothing, or if even he had said that at the end of the time he would be free to ask you to marry him."

"But that would have been binding me unfairly, most people would say," replied Lilius, softly. "I believe he means to leave me quite free, but that he could not help catching at a straw, as it were, and therefore said that about two years."

“I don’t believe in the two years,” persisted Mary; “even if he does not come into his property for two years, you might have been engaged, though not marrying for that time. No, I see no sense in it—it is some clever pretext of that——” “that scheming Mr. Cheviott’s,” she was going to have said, but she stopped in time.

“Mary,” said Liliás, drawing away the hand which her sister had held in hers, “I told you I would not let you speak against him.”

“Forgive me. I won’t,” said Mary, penitently,

“Whatever the future brings—if he marry some one else within the two years,” said Liliás, “I shall still always believe in the Arthur Beverley I have known. He may change—circumstances and other influences may change him, but the man *I*

have known is true and honourable, and has wished and tried to act rightly. This I shall always believe—till I am quite an old woman—an old maid,” she added, with an attempt at a smile.

“Lily,” exclaimed Mary, with a touch of actual passion in her tone—“Lily, don’t. You are so beautiful, my own Lily, why should you be so tried? So beautiful and so good!” And Mary, Mary the calm, Mary the wise, ended up her attempt at strengthening and consoling her sister by bursting into tears herself.

It did Liliass good. Now it was her turn to comfort and support.

“I am not an old woman yet, Mary,” she said, caressingly, “and I don’t intend to become one any sooner than I can help. My hair isn’t going to turn grey by to-morrow morning. To-morrow, oh! Mary, do you remember what I said yesterday

about 'this time to-morrow'? I was so happy this time yesterday, and he said he would be here to-day—it was the very last thing he said to me. What *can* have happened to change it all?"

Again the misgiving shot through Mary's heart. Had she done harm? She said nothing, and after a moment's pause Liliás spoke again—

"The great thing you can do to help me just now, Mary, is to prevent any of the others thinking there is anything the matter. Outside people may say what they like—I don't care for that—but it is at home I couldn't stand it. Besides, we have so few neighbours and friends, we are not likely to be troubled with many remarks. Except Mrs. Greville, perhaps, I don't suppose anyone has heard anything about Captain Beverley's knowing us."

"Only at the ball," said Mary, hesitatingly; "he picked you out so."

"Yes," said Liliás, smiling sarcastically, "no doubt all the great people said I was behaving most unbecomingly; but they may say what they like. I know I don't care for that part of it. Mary, you will say something to mother to prevent her asking me about it."

"Yes," said Mary. "Liliás, would you like to go away from home for a while?"

"I don't know. How could I? There is nowhere I could go, unless you mean that I should be a governess, after all, and——" She stopped, and her face flushed again.

"And what?"

"I don't like to say it; you will not enter into my feelings—I don't want to do anything *he* would not like."

Mary looked at her sadly.

“Poor Liliass!” she thought, “is ‘he’ worthy of it all?”—“I was not thinking of that,” she said aloud. “I meant, if it could be arranged, for you to go away for a visit for a little. Mrs. Greville’s sister asked you once.”

“Yes, but ever so long ago, and I wouldn’t on any account propose such a thing to Mrs. Greville just now.”

“Very well,” said Mary.

Then they kissed each other, and said good night.

“Two years—two long years!” were the words that Liliass said to herself over and over again that night—words that mingled themselves in the dreams that disturbed such sleep as came to her. “Two years!—what can it all mean? But I will trust you, Arthur—I *will* trust you!”

“Two years!” thought Mary. “That part of it *can* be nothing but a pretext.

And if Liliás goes on trusting and hoping, it will make it all the worse for her in the end. She has never had any real trouble, and she thinks herself stronger to bear it than she really is. I have always heard that that terrible sort of waiting is worse for a girl than anything. Oh ! Lily, what can I do for you ? And *have* I made it worse ? If I had been gentler, perhaps, to that hard, proud man—there was a kind look in his eyes once or twice ; he cannot know that it is no piece of idle flirtation—he cannot know how Liliás cares. If I could see him again ! I feel as if I could say burning words that would make him realise the wretchedness of separating those two.”

CHAPTER III.

A TEMPTING OPPORTUNITY.

“Thou troublest me ; I am not in the vein.”

Richard III.

THE days went on, and things at Hathercourt Rectory looked much the same as usual. But not many had passed before, to Mary's watching eyes, it seemed that Lilius was flagging. She had kept up, as she said she would, she had seemed as cheerful, *almost*, as usual, she had not overacted her part either, there had been no excitement or affectation about her in any way. But, all the more,

it had been hard work, very hard work, and Mary's heart ached when she saw the first signs of physical prostration beginning to show themselves.

"She looks so pale and so thin, and her eyes haven't the least of their old sparkle," said Mary to herself, "if it goes on, she will get really ill, I know."

And, in truth, Liliás was beginning herself to lose faith in her own strength and self-control. She had been buoyed up by a hope she had not liked to allude to to Mary. A hope which, long deferred, has made many a heart sick besides Liliás Western's—the hope of a letter!

There was no reason, which she knew of, why Arthur should not write to her.

"He might say in a letter what, perhaps, he would have shrunk from saying directly," she thought, forgetting that the same strong influence which had sent Arthur

away would have foreseen and guarded against his writing to her. And as day by day came and went, and every morning the post-bag was opened without her hopes being fulfilled, Liliás's heart grew very weary.

“If I had known him anywhere but *here*,” she said to Mary one day, “I don’t think it would have been quite so hard. But here, at home, he seemed to have grown already so associated with everything. And, Mary,” she went on, with a sort of little sob, “it wasn’t all only about myself I was thinking. He is rich, you know ; and I couldn’t help fancying sometimes it might be a good thing for us all—for you and the younger girls, and for mother. *He* even encouraged this, for he more than once made little allusions to the sort of things he would like to do if he dared. One day, I remember, when

mother was tired, he said to me ‘how he would like to choose a pony carriage for her that she could get about in, and have more variety without fatigue.’ We were walking up and down the terrace—it was late in the afternoon, and there was red in the sky that shone through the branches of the group of old oaks at the end—do you remember that afternoon, Mary? The sky looks something the same to-day, but not so bright—it was that that reminded me of it.”

“No,” said Mary, “I don’t remember that particular afternoon. But I do know that he was always kind and considerate, especially to mother, and I cannot believe that it was not sincere.”

She gave a little sigh as she spoke; they were standing together at the window, and as Lillas leant against the panes, gazing out, her attitude so languid and hopeless,

the sharpened lines of her profile all struck Mary with a chill misgiving.

"Lilias," she said, suddenly, "you must go away from home for a while. What you have said just now about the associations here strengthens my feeling about it: You must have some change."

"I don't think it is possible, and I would much, very much rather stay at home," said Lilias.

And till she had some definite scheme to propose, Mary thought it no use to contradict her.

But morning, noon, and night she was thinking of Lilias, always of Lilias and her troubles, and revolving in her head over and over again every possible and impossible means of making her happy again.

Two mornings after the conversation in the window the postboy brought a note for

Lilias from Mrs. Greville. It was at breakfast time that it came. They were all together at the table.

"A letter for you, Lilias," said her father, as he handed it to her.

Now letters for the Western girls were a rarity. They had few relations and almost fewer friends, for they had never been at school, and seldom left home. So when Mr. Western's apparently most commonplace announcement was made, six pair of eyes turned with interest, not to say curiosity, in Lilias's direction, and even her mother and Mary glanced towards her with involuntary anxiety.

"A letter for Lily," cried Josey, darting up from her seat. "Do let's see it. Who's it from?"

"*Josephine!*" exclaimed Mary, severely, "how *can* you be so unladylike? Mother, do speak to her," and the little bustle of

reproof of Josey that ensued effectually diverted the general attention.

Mary's little ruse had succeeded, and her mother understood it. But for this, even little Francie could hardly have failed to notice the deathly paleness which, at her father's words, overspread poor Liliás's face. For an instant only : one glance at the envelope, and the intensity passed out of her eyes.

"A note from Mrs. Greville," she said, carelessly, as soon as she felt able to control the trembling in her voice. "She wants Mary and me to go to stay there for two nights—she expects one or two young friends from somewhere or other, and wants us to help to entertain them, I suppose."

"It is very kind of her to think of the variety for you, *I* think," said Mr. Western.

“Why should you be so ungracious about it, Liliass?”

The girl’s face flushed painfully.

“I don’t mean to be ungracious, father dear,” she said, gently, “but I don’t care about going.”

Mr. Western was beginning to look mystified, when Mary’s voice diverted his attention.

“*I shall go,*” she said, abruptly, “that is to say,” she added, colouring a little in her turn, “I should like to go, if I can.”

“Dear me,” said her father, “how the tables are turned! It used to be always Liliass who was eager to go, and Mary to stay at home.”

“But there is no objection to Mary’s going, if she likes,” interposed Mrs. Western, hastily.

“Objection, of course not. There is no

objection to their both going that I can see," said Mr. Western.

"Well, we'll talk about it afterwards," said Mrs. Western. "Girls, you had better go to the school-room. We are later than usual this morning."

They all rose, and Lillas was thankful to get away ; but as Mary and she left the room together, they overheard a remark of their father's to the effect that Lillas was not looking well, had not her mother observed it ?

"I daresay she would be the better for a thorough change," replied Mrs. Western. "It is so long since she left home."

"Oh, yes !" said her father, with a sigh. "They would *all* enjoy a change, and no one needs it more than yourself, Margaret. It makes me very anxious when I think about these girls sometimes."

“But, at the worst, they are far better off in every other way than I was at their age,” said Mrs. Western, “and see how happy I have been.”

“Ideas of happiness differ so,” said her husband. “I fear a quiet life in a country parsonage on limited means would hardly satisfy Liliás. As to Mary, I somehow feel less anxiety. She takes things so placidly.”

“Not always,” said Mrs. Western, under her breath; but she was glad that her husband did not catch the words, and that little Brooke’s running in with some inquiry about his lessons interrupted the conversation—for it was trenching on dangerous ground.

“I am afraid papa thinks there is something vexing me,” said Liliás, when Mary and she were alone together for a little.

“You have yourself to blame for it,” said Mary, with some asperity; “why did you speak so indifferently of Mrs. Greville’s invitation? Usually you would have been very pleased to go.”

“Oh, Mary, don’t scold me,” said Lillas, pathetically. “I *couldn’t* go to Uxley—you forget how near Romary it is—I should be sure to hear gossip about him—perhaps that he was going to be married, or some falsehood of the kind. I could not bear it. I almost wondered at your saying you would like to go.”

“It will only be for a couple of days,” said Mary.

“But you are not intending to make any plan with Mrs. Greville for my leaving home, I hope, Mary?” said Lillas, anxiously. “It may be better for me to go away after a while, but not yet. And if you came upon the subject with Mrs. Greville

in the very least, she would suspect something. Promise me you will not do anything without telling me."

"Of course not," said Mary. "I would not dream of doing such a thing without telling you."

But her conscience smote her slightly as she spoke. Why?

A design was slowly but steadily taking shape in her mind, and Mrs. Greville's note this morning had strangely forwarded and confirmed it. Practically speaking, indeed, it had done more than confirm it—it had rendered feasible what had before floated in Mary's brain as an act of devotion scarcely more possible of achievement than poor Prascovia's journey across Siberia. And though Mary was sensible and reasonable, there lay below this quiet surface stormy possibilities and an impressionability little suspected by those who knew

her best. Her mind, too, from dwelling of late so incessantly on her sister's affairs, had grown morbidly imaginative on the point, though to this she herself was hardly alive.

"I am not superstitious or fanciful—I know I am not. I never have been," she argued, "yet it does seem as if this invitation to Uxley had come on purpose. If I *were* superstitious I should think it a 'sign.'"

And who is not superstitious?—only for no other human weakness have we so many names, so many or such skilfully contrived disguises!

Two days later, "the day after to-morrow," found Mary on her way to Uxley Vicarage. Mrs. Greville had sent her pony-carriage to fetch her. The old man who drove it was very deaf and hopelessly irresponsible, therefore, to the young lady's

kindly-meant civilities in the shape of inquiries about the road and commendation of the fat pony, so before long she felt herself free to lapse into perfect silence, and as they jogged along the pretty country lanes—pretty to-day, though only February, for the sky was clear and the air mild with a faint odour of coming Spring about it—Mary had plenty of time to think over her plan of action.

But thinking it over, after all, was not much good, till she knew more of her ground.

“I must to some extent be guided by circumstances,” she said to herself, but with a strong sense of confidence in her own ability to prevent circumstances being too much for her. She had never before felt so certain of herself as now, when about, for the first time in her life, to act entirely on her own responsibility, and the

sensation brought with it a curious excitement and invigoration. She had not felt so hopeful or light-hearted since the day of the Brocklehurst ball, and she was thankful to feel so, and to be told by Mrs. Greville, when she jumped out of the pony-carriage and was met by her hospitable hostess at the gate, that she had never seen her looking so well in her life.

“There is no fear of her suspecting anything about Lillas,” thought Mary, with relief, “if she thinks me in such good spirits.”

“And how are you all at home, my dear?” said Mrs. Greville, as she led Mary into her comfortable drawing-room, and bade her “toast” herself a little before unfastening her wraps. “Your poor dear mother and all?”

“They are all very well, thank you,” Mary replied. “Mamma is quite well,

and so pleased at Basil's getting on so well —we have such good news of him."

She always felt inclined to make the *very* best of the family chronicle in answer to Mrs. Greville's inquiries, for though unmistakably prompted by the purest kindness her want of tact often invested them with a slight tone of patronage which Lillas herself could scarcely have resented more keenly than her less impulsive sister. The "poor dear mother," especially grated on Mary's ears. "Mamma," so pretty and young-looking, was no fit object for the "poor dears" of anyone but themselves, thought Mrs Western's tall sons and daughters.

But of course it would have been no less ungrateful than senseless to have taken amiss Mrs. Greville's well-meant interest and sympathy, even when they directed themselves to more delicate ground.

“And what about Liliás, Mary dear?” she inquired next. “I had been longing to hear all about it, and *wishing* so I had authority to contradict the absurd rumours that I have heard about Captain Beverley. I was dreadfully disappointed at Liliás’s not coming, but consoled myself by thinking you would tell me all about it.”

“But what are the rumours, and what have they to do with Liliás?” asked Mary.

“That’s just what I want to know,” replied Mrs. Greville. “Captain Beverley has left Romary suddenly—of course you know that—and some people say he has made a vow never to return there because Miss Cheviott refused him the night of the Brocklehurst ball. That story *I* don’t believe, of course. Others say it was not Miss Cheviott, but another young lady, whose name no one about here seems to know, but whom he was seen to dance with

tremendously that night, who refused him."

Mrs. Greville stopped and looked curiously at Mary, who smiled quietly, but said nothing, and felt increasingly thankful that Lilius had not accompanied her to Uxley.

"And there are stranger stories than these even," pursued Mrs. Greville. "You will think me a terrible gossip, Mary, but in a general way I really don't listen to idle talk, only I felt so interested in Captain Beverley after what I saw, and I can't believe any harm of him."

"Who can have said any harm of him?" inquired Mary. "I should have thought him quite a general favourite; he is so bright, and kindly, and unaffected."

"Yes, I thought him very nice," said Mrs. Greville. "But there are dreadful stories about, as to the reason of his leav-

ing Romary so suddenly. One is that he has been gambling so furiously that he is embarrassed past redemption, and that he will only come into his property for it to be sold; and another is that Mr. Cheviott found out that he had secretly made some low marriage, and turned him out of the house on that account, it having been always intended that he should marry Miss Cheviott."

Mary was standing by the fire looking down on it as Mrs. Greville spoke—the reflection of its ruddy glow hid the intense paleness which came over her face, and explained, too, the burning flush which almost instantly succeeded it. She felt obliged to speak, for silence might have seemed suspicious.

"What a shame of people to say such things!" she exclaimed, looking up indignantly. "No, I certainly don't believe

them, but I am glad to know about it all, for it shows what disagreeable gossip there might have been about Liliás had her name been mixed up with it."

"Yes, indeed, but, my dear child, you are scorching your face to cinders—you should not play such pranks with your complexion, though that brownish pink skin of yours is a very good kind to wear, and quite as pretty, in my opinion, as Liliás's lilies and roses—but what was I saying? Oh, yes, by-the-by, I do wish you would tell me—I shall be as discreet as possible—is Liliás engaged to him?"

Mary hesitated a moment. Then she said, gently,

"Dear Mrs. Greville, I wish you wouldn't ask me, for I *can't* tell you."

"Ah, well, never mind," said her hostess, good-naturedly. "You'll tell me whenever you can, no doubt, and I hope it will

all come right in the end, however it stands at present."

"Thank you," said Mary, with sincerity.

Then they went on to talk of other things. Mrs. Greville described to Mary the "young people" who were staying with her, two girls and their brother, cousins of Mr. Greville's first wife, and counselled her to make herself as pretty and charming as possible, to fascinate young Morpeth, who would be a conquest by no means to be despised.

"He is nothing at present," she said; "he has a thousand a year, and his sisters the same between them. They are orphans, and have had no settled home since their mother's death. Vance Morpeth is talking of going into the cavalry for a few years, but his elder sister is against it, and he will be too old if he isn't quick about

it. They have been abroad all the Winter. Now remember, Mary, you are to do your best to captivate him, unless, indeed," she went on, as Mary was turning to her with some smiling rejoinder—"unless *you* have some little secret of your own too, with that haughty-looking Mr. Cheviott for its hero."

The smile died out of Mary's face.

"Don't joke about that man, *please*, Mrs. Greville," she said, beseechingly. "You do not know how I dislike him. I have never regretted anything more in my whole life than dancing with him that night."

And just then the timepiece striking five, she was glad to make the excuse that she would be late for dinner unless she hurried upstairs to get her things unpacked, for fashionable hours had not yet penetrated to Uxley.

“Yes, go, my dear,” said Mrs. Greville. “Fancy, we have been a whole hour talking over the fire. I hear the Morpeths coming in—they must have been a very long walk, and it’s quite dark outside. I cannot understand why people can’t go walks in the morning instead of putting off till late in the afternoon, and then catching colds and all sorts of disagreeables. Run off, Mary. I daresay you would rather not see them till you are dressed.”

Which Mary, who cared very little for seeing “them” at all, rightly interpreted as meaning, “I don’t want Mr. Morpeth to see you till you are nicely dressed, and looking to the best advantage.”

Her powers of looking her best depended much more on herself than on her clothes, for her choice of attire was limited enough. But the suppressed excitement under

which she was labouring had given unusual brilliance to Mary's at all times beautiful brown eyes, and a certain vivacity to her manner, in general somewhat too staid and sober for her age. So she looked more than "pretty" this evening, though her dress was nothing but a many-times-washed white muslin, brightened up here and there by a little rose-coloured ribbon.

"I thought you told me that it was not the *pretty* Miss Western that you expected?" said Mr. Morpeth to Mrs. Greville in a low voice, after the introductions had been accomplished.

Mrs. Greville glanced up at the young man as she answered. There was a puzzled expression in his innocent-looking eyes; she saw that he was quite in earnest, and, indeed, she felt sure he was too little of a man of the world to have intended his inquiry for a compliment.

“Does that mean that you think this one pretty?” she asked.

“Of course it does. I think she’s awfully pretty, don’t you?” he said, frankly.

Mrs. Greville felt well pleased, but the announcement of dinner interrupted any more talk between them. Mr. Morpeth had to take Mrs. Greville, but *she* took care that Mary should sit at his other side.

“How would you define ‘awfully pretty,’ Mary?” she said, mischievously, when they were all seated at table, and the grace had been said, and nobody seemed to have anything particular to talk about.

“Awfully pretty,” repeated Mary. “Awfully pretty what?”

“An ‘awfully pretty’ girl was the ‘what’ in question,” said Mr. Morpeth, shielding himself by taking the bull by the horns,

with more alertness than Mrs. Greville had given him credit for.

Mary smiled.

"I could easily define, or point out to you rather, what, if I were a man, *I* should call an awfully pretty girl in this very neighbourhood," she said, turning to Mrs. Greville.

"I know whom you mean," replied her hostess. "Miss Cheviott, is it not? Yes, she is *exceedingly* pretty. You have not seen her, Frances," she went on to the eldest Miss Morpeth. "I wish you could."

"Shall we not see her at church on Sunday?" said Miss Morpeth. "Are not the Cheviotts the principal people here now?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Greville, "but they are a good deal away from home." Here Mary's heart almost stopped beating—this

was what she had been longing yet dreading to inquire about—what would become of all her plans should Mr. Cheviott be away? But it was not so. “They are a good deal away from home,” Mrs. Greville went on, “and there is another church nearer Romary than ours, where they go in the morning. But they *very* often—indeed, almost always the last few weeks, come to Uxley in the afternoon—Mr. Cheviott likes Mr. Greville’s preaching better than the old man’s at Romary Moor.”

“That’s not much of a compliment, my dear,” said Mr. Greville from the end of the table, “considering that poor old Wells is so asthmatic that you can hardly catch a word he says now.”

A little laugh went round, and under cover of it Mary managed to say gently to Mr. Greville,

“Then Mr. Cheviott is at Romary now?”

“Oh, yes; saw him this morning riding past,” was the reply.

Mary gave a little sigh of relief, yet her heart beat faster for the rest of the evening.

“I wonder if I must do it to-morrow,” she said to herself, “or not till the day after. I have only the two days to count upon, and supposing he is out and I have to go again! I must try for to-morrow, I think.”

“Romary is just two miles from here, is it not?” she said, in a common-place tone.

“Not so much,” replied Mr. Greville.

“Have you never seen it? It is quite a show place.”

“I was there once—some years ago,” said Mary.

“It is very much improved of late. If

the family had been away we might easily have driven you over to see it," said Mr. Greville, good-naturedly. "However, some other time, perhaps, when your sister is here too. You must come over oftener this Summer," he added, utterly forgetting, if ever he had quite taken in, all his wife's confidences about the Western girls' wonderful successes at the Brocklehurst ball, and her more recent misgiving that something had "come between" Liliass and "that handsome Captain Beverley."

"Thank you," said Mary; and after this no more was said about Romary or the Cheviotts.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. CHEVIOTT'S ULTIMATUM.

“ ‘But methinks,’ quoth I, under my breath,
 ‘’Twas but cowardly work.’ ”

Songs of Two Worlds.

THE next morning gave promise of a fine day, and Mary felt that she must be in readiness to seize any favourable opportunity for her meditated expedition.

“For to-morrow,” she said to herself, while she was dressing, “may be wet and stormy, and I must not weaken my position by making myself look ridiculous, if I can help it. And I certainly should look the

reverse of dignified if I trudged over to Romary in a waterproof and goloshes ! I very much doubt if I should get a sight of Mr. Cheviott at all in such a case."

She was trying to laugh at herself, by way of keeping up her spirits, but of real laughter there was very little in her heart. Even yesterday's excitement seemed to have deserted her, and but for a curious kind of self-reliance, self-trust rather, which Mary possessed a good deal of, the chances are that she would have given up her intention and returned to Hathercourt and to Liliás, feeling that the attempt to interfere had been impossible for her.

"But I foresaw this," she said to herself, reassuringly. "I knew I should lose heart and courage when it came to close quarters—but close quarters is not the best position for deciding such an action as this. I must remember that I resolved upon what

I am going to do, deliberately and coolly. It seemed to me a right thing to do, and I must have faith in my own decision. At the worst, at the *very* worst, all that can happen to me will be that that man will think I am mad, or something like it, to take such a step—perhaps he will make a good story of it, and laugh me over with his friends—though I must say he hasn't the look of being given to laugh at anything! But why need I care if he does? I care nothing, *less* than nothing, what he thinks of me. I can keep my own self-respect, and that is all I need to care about."

And so speaking to herself, in all sincerity, with no bravado or exaggeration, Mary more firmly riveted her own decision, and determined to go back upon it no more.

But she was paler than usual this morning, when she made her appearance at Mrs.

Greville's breakfast-table, and her eyes had an unmistakable look of anxiety and weariness.

"Have you not slept well, my dear Mary?" asked Mrs. Greville, kindly. "You look so tired, and last night you looked so *very* well."

Mary's colour rose quickly at these words and under the consciousness of a somewhat searching glance from Mr. Morpeth, who was seated opposite her.

"I am *perfectly* well, thank you," she replied, to her hostess, "but somehow I don't think I did sleep quite as soundly as usual."

"Miss Western's room is not haunted, surely?" said Mr. Morpeth, laughing. "All this sounds so like the preamble to some ghostly revelation."

"No, indeed. There is no corner of this house that we could possibly flatter our-

selves was haunted. I wish there were—it is all so *very* modern,” said Mrs. Greville. “At Romary, now, there is such an exquisite haunted room—or suite of rooms rather. They are never used, but I think them the prettiest rooms in the house. It *is* so provoking that the Cheviotts are at home just now. I should so have liked you and Cecilia to see the house, Frances—and you, too, Mary, as you had never been there, and we can get an order from the agent any time.”

“I think the outside of the house as well worth seeing as any part of it,” said Mr. Greville. “It is so well situated, and seen from the high road it looks very well indeed. By-the-by, I shall be driving that way this afternoon if any of you young ladies care to come with me in the dog-cart? I am going on to Little Bexton, but if you don’t care to come so far, I could

drop you about Romary, and you could walk back. The country is not pretty after that. Would you like to come, Frances? Cecilia has a cold, I hear."

"Yes," said Cecilia, "but not a very bad one. But I don't think either of us can go, Mr. Greville, for Miss Bentley is coming to see us this afternoon, and we must not be out."

"Mary, then?" said Mr. Greville.

Mary's heart was beating fast, and she was almost afraid that the tremble in her voice was perceptible as she replied that she would enjoy the drive very much, she was sure.

"But I will not go all the way to Little Bexton, I think, if you don't mind dropping me on the road. I should like the walk home," she said to Mr. Greville, and so it was decided. And for a wonder nothing came in the way.

It was years and years since Mary had been at Romary. When Mr. Greville "dropped her" on the road, at a point about half a mile beyond the lodge gates, all about her seemed so strange and unfamiliar that she could scarcely believe she had ever been there before. Strange and unfamiliar, even though she was not more than ten miles from her own home, and though the general features of the landscape were the same. For to a real dweller in the country, differences and variations, which by a casual visitor are unobservable, are extraordinarily obtrusive. Mary had lived all her life at Hathercourt, and knew its fields and its trees, its cottages and lanes, as accurately as the furniture of her mother's drawing-room. It was strange to her to meet even a dog on the road whose ownership she was unacquainted with, and when a countryman or two passed

her with a half stare of curiosity instead of the familiar "Good day to you, Miss Mary," she felt herself "very far west" indeed, and instinctively hastened her steps.

"It is a good thing no one does know me about here," she said to herself; "but how strange it seems! What a different life we have led from most people now-a-days! I daresay it would never occur to Miss Cheviott, for instance, to think it at all strange to meet people on the road whose names and histories she knew nothing of? Young as she is, I daresay she has more friends and acquaintances than she can remember. How different from Lillas and me—ah, yes, it is *that* that makes what her brother has done so awfully wrong—so *mean*—but will he understand? Shall I be able to show it him?"

Mary stopped short—she was close to

the lodge gates now. She stood still for a moment in a sort of silence of excitement and determination—then resolutely walked on again and hesitated no more. These Romary lodge gates had become to her a Rubicon.

It was a quarter of a mile at least from the gates to the house, but to Mary it seemed scarcely half a dozen yards. As in a dream, she walked on steadily, heedless of the scene around her, that at another time would have roused her keen admiration—the beautiful old trees, beautiful even in leafless February; the wide stretching park with its gentle ups and downs and far-off boundary of forest-land; the wistful-eyed deer, too tame to be scared by her approach; the sudden vision of a rabbit scuttering across her path—Mary saw none of them. Only once, as she stood still for an instant to unlatch a gate in the wire fence

enclosing the grounds close to the house, she looked round her and her gaze rested on a cluster of oaks at a little distance.

“When I see that clump of trees next,” she said to herself, “it will be over, and I shall know Liliás’s fate.”

Then she walked on again.

The bell clanged loudly as she pulled it at the hall door—to Mary, at least, it sounded so, and the interval was very short between its tones fading away into silence and the door’s being flung open by a footman, who gave a little start of astonishment when Mary’s unfamiliar voice caught his ear.

“I thought it was Miss Cheviott; I beg your pardon, ma’am,” he said, civilly enough, and the civility was a relief to Mary. “Is it Miss Cheviott you wish to see?”

“No, thank you,” said Mary, quietly.

"I want to see *Mr.* Cheviott, if he is at home—on a matter of business, perhaps you will be good enough to say."

The man looked puzzled, and, for a moment, hesitated.

"If it is anything I could say, perhaps," he began. "Unless it was anything very particular. My master is very busy to-day, and gave orders not to be disturbed."

"It is something particular—that is to say, I wish to see Mr. Cheviott himself. Perhaps you will *inquire* if he is to be seen," said Mary, more coldly.

The man looked at her again, and Mary felt glad she had not her old waterproof-cloak on. As it was, she was prettily, at least, not unbecomingly dressed in a thick, rough tweed and small, close-fitting felt hat. Her boots were neat, and her gloves—the only new pair she had had this Winter—fitted well. There was no-

thing about her attire plainer or poorer than what would be worn by many a girl of her age, "regardless of expense," for a country ramble. And Mr. Cheviott's servant was not to know it was all her Sunday best! Then she was tall! An immense advantage, now and then, in life.

"Certainly, ma'am, I will inquire at once," said the man. He was a new-comer, who had served a town apprenticeship to the dangers of indiscriminate admittance, and felt, despite appearances, he must be on his guard against a young woman who so resolutely demanded a personal interview with a gentleman. A man in disguise—what might she not be? But something in Mary's low-toned "thank you" reassured him.

"Will you step into the library while I ask?" he said, amiably, and Mary judged it best to do as he proposed.

There was no one in the library, and one of Mary's but half-acknowledged wild hopes faded away as she entered the empty room. She had had a dream of perhaps meeting with Alys in the first place—the girl with the beautiful face and bewitching smile—of her guessing her errand, and pleading on her side.

“She looked so sympathisingly at me that night at Brocklehurst,” thought Mary —“almost as if she suspected my anxiety. Oh ! if only I could talk to *her*, instead of that proud, cold brother of hers !”

But there was no Alys in the library, and an instant's thought reminded Mary that of course she, a stranger calling on “business,” would not have been ushered, except by mistake, into Miss Cheviott's presence, and she gave a little sigh as she mechanically crossed the room, and stood gazing out of the window.

The servant's voice recalled her thoughts.

"Your name, if you please, ma'am?" he was asking.

Mary was prepared for this.

"It would be no use giving my name," she said, quietly. "If you will be so good as to say to Mr. Cheviott that I am only in this neighbourhood for a day or two, and have called to see him purely on a matter of business, I shall be much obliged to you."

The man left the room. He went into Mr. Cheviott's study by another door than the one by which it communicated with the library, but through this last, firmly closed though it was, in a moment or two the murmur of voices caught Mary's quick ears, then some words, spoken loudly enough for her to distinguish their sense.

"*Where*, do you say—in the library?

A lady! Nonsense, it must be some mistake."

Then the servant's voice again in explanation. Mary moved away from the vicinity of the treacherous door.

A minute or two passed. Then the man appeared again.

"I am sorry, ma'am," he began, apologetically, "but my master will be particularly obliged by your sending your name. He is so much engaged to-day—would like to understand if it is anything very particular, and——" He hesitated, not liking to repeat his own suggestion to Mr. Cheviott that very likely the young lady was collecting for the foreign missions, or a school treat, and might just as well as not send her message by him.

"It is something particular," said Mary, chafing inwardly not a little at the difficulty of obtaining an audience of Mr.

Cheviott—"as if he were a royal personage almost," she said to herself. "You can tell Mr. Cheviott that the business on which I wish to see him is something particular; and my name is Miss Western."

Again the envoy disappeared. Again the murmuring voices through the door, then a hasty sound as of some one pushing back a chair in impatience, and in another moment the door between the rooms opened, and some one came into the library. Not the man-servant this time, nor did he, lingering behind his master in the study in hopes of quenching his curiosity, obtain much satisfaction, for Mr. Cheviott, advancing but one step into the library, and catching sight of its occupant, turned sharply and closed the door in the man's face before giving any sign of recognition of his visitor—before, in fact, seeming to

have perceived her at all. Then he came forward slowly.

Mary was still standing ; as Mr. Cheviott came nearer her, she bowed slightly, and began at once to speak.

“I can hardly expect you to recognise me,” she said, calmly. “I am Miss Western, the *second* Miss Western, from Hathercourt.”

Mr. Cheviott bowed.

“I had the pleasure of being intro—I had the honour of meeting you at one of the Brocklehurst balls,” he said, inquiringly.

“Yes,” said Mary, “and once before—at Hathercourt Church one Sunday when you and your friends came over to the morning service. Before that day I do not think I ever heard your name, and yet I have come to your house to-day to say to you what it would be hard to say to an

old friend—to ask you to listen while I try to make you see that you have been interfering unwarrantably in other people's affairs ; that what you have done is a cruel and bad thing, a thing you may sorely repent, that I believe you *will* repent, Mr. Cheviott, if you are not already doing so?"

She raised her voice slightly to a tone of inquiry as she stopped, and, for the first time, looked up, straight into Mr. Cheviott's face. She had been speaking in a low tone, but with great distinctness, and without hurry, yet when she left off it seemed as if her breath had failed her, as if her intense nervous resolution could carry her no further. Now she waited anxiously to see the effect of her words ; she had determined beforehand to plunge at once, without preamble, into what she had to say, yet even now she was dissatisfied with what she had done. It seemed

to her that she had made her appeal in an exaggerated and theatrical fashion; she wished she had waited for Mr. Cheviott to speak first.

She looked at him, and for an instant there was silence. His countenance was not so stern and impassive as she had once before seen it, but its expression was even more unpromising. It bespoke extreme annoyance and surprise, "disgusted surprise," said Mary to herself; "he thinks me lost to all sense of propriety, I can see."

She could *not* see her own face; she was unconscious of the pale anxiety which overspread it, of the wistful questioning in the brown eyes which Mr. Cheviott remembered so bright and sunny; she could not know that it would have needed a more than hard heart, an actually cruel one, not to be touched by the inten-

sity in her young face—by the pathos of her position of appeal.

At first some instinct—a not unchivalrous instinct either—urged Mr. Cheviott to refrain from a direct reply to Mary's unmistakably direct attack.

“Will she not regret this fearfully afterwards?” he said to himself. “When she finds that I remain quite untouched, when she decides, as she *must*, that I am a brute! I will give her time to draw back by showing her the uselessness of all this before she commits herself further.”

But Mary saw his hesitation, and it deepened the resentment with which she heard his reply.

“Miss Western,” he said, “you must be under some extraordinary delusion. I will not pretend entire ignorance of what your words—words that, of course, from a lady I cannot resent—of what your

words refer to, but pray stop before you say more. I ventured once before to try to warn you—or rather another through you, and this, I suppose, has led to your taking this—this very unusual step” (“what a mean brute I am making of myself,” he said to himself, “but it is the kindest in the end to show her the hopelessness at once”)—“under, I must repeat, some delusion, or rather complete misapprehension of my possible influence in the matter.”

Mary was silent.

“You must allow me to remind you,” continued Mr. Cheviott, hating himself, or the self he was obliged to make himself appear, more and more with each word he uttered, “that you are very young and inexperienced, and little attentions—passing trivialities, in fact, which more worldly-wise young ladies would attach no significance to, may have acquired a mistaken import-

ance with you and your sister. I am very sorry—*very* sorry that anyone connected with me should have acted so thoughtlessly; but you must allow, Miss Western, that I warned you—went out of my way to warn you, as delicately as I knew how, when I saw the danger of—of—any mistake being made.”

Mary heard him out. Then she looked up again, with no appeal this time in her eyes, but in its stead righteous wrath and indignation.

“You are not speaking the truth,” she said—“at least, what you are *inferring* is not the truth. If it were the case that Captain Beverley’s ‘attentions’ to my sister were so trifling and meaningless—such as he may have paid to other girls scores of times—*why* did you go out of your way to warn us? It could not possibly have been out of respect for us; you

knew and cared as little about us as we about you, and if you had said it was out of any care for us, the saying so would have been an unwarrantable freedom. No, Mr. Cheviott, you knew Captain Beverley was in earnest, and your pride took fright lest he should make so poor a marriage. That is the truth, but I wish you had not made matters worse by denying it."

The blood mounted to Mr. Cheviott's forehead; his dark face looked darker. That last speech of his had been a false move, and Mary knew it and he knew it; still his presence of mind did not desert him.

"Believing what you do, then, Miss Western—I shall not again trouble you to believe anything *I* say—may I ask how, supposing my cousin to have been, as you express it, in earnest, you explain his not having gone further?"

"How I explain it?" exclaimed Mary. "You ask me that? I explain it by the fact that brought me here; *you* stopped his going further."

"Influenced, no doubt, by the pride you alluded to just now."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Mary, dejectedly. "Influenced, at least, by some motive that blinded you to what you were doing. A girl's broken heart is a trifle, I know, but the loss of a good influence over a man's life is not a trifle, even you will allow. Captain Beverley thinks he owes you a great deal; I strongly suspect he owes you a great deal more than he at present realises. Mr. Cheviott, do you not *know* that what you have done is a wrong and bad thing?"

Again her eyes took the pleading expression. Mr. Cheviott turned away to avoid it. Then he said, very coldly,

“It is extremely unpleasant to have to say unpleasant things, but you force me to it. Supposing, for argument’s sake—supposing things were as you believe, I should certainly act as you believe I have acted. I should, by every means in my power, endeavour to prevent my cousin’s making a marriage which would be utterly ill-advised and unsuitable, which would destroy his happiness, and which I cannot believe would be for the happiness of any-one concerned.”

Mary’s face grew white as death. It was all over, then. She had lowered herself to this man for nothing. In the misery of thoroughly realising her defeat—the downthrow of all the hopes which unconsciously she had been cherishing more fondly than she had had any idea of—she, for the moment, forgot to be angry—she lost sight, as it were, of Mr. Che-

viott; in the depth of her disappointment, he became simply the incarnation of a cruel fate.

But he, at this juncture, was very far from losing sight of Mary. Her silent pallor frightened him, he thought she was going to faint, and he felt as if he were a murderer. A rush of pity and compunction roused his instinct of hospitality.

“Miss Western,” he said, gently, and with a look in his eyes of which Mary, when she afterwards recalled it, could not altogether deny the kindness and sympathy, “I fear you have overtired yourself. This wretched business has been too much for you. Will you allow me to get you a glass of wine?”

Mary hastily shook her head, and the effort to recover her self-control—for she felt herself on the point of bursting into

tears—brought back the colour to her cheeks.

“I will go now,” she said, turning towards the door.

Mr. Cheviott interrupted her.

“Will you not allow me to say one word of regret for the pain I have caused you?” he said, anxiously, humbly almost. “Will you not allow me to say how deeply I admire and—and respect your courage and sisterly devotion?”

Mary shook her head.

“No,” she said. “I could not believe you if you said anything of the kind, knowing you now as I do. And I earnestly hope I may never see you and never speak to you again.”

The words were childish, but the tone and manner gave them force, and their force went home. Mr. Cheviott

winned visibly. Yet once again he spoke.

"You may resent my saying so at present," he said, "but afterwards you may be glad to recall my assurance that no one shall ever hear from me one word of what has been said just now."

Mary turned upon him with ineffable contempt.

"I daresay not," she said. "For your own sake you will do well to keep silence. For *mine* you may tell it where and to whom you choose."

Again Mr. Cheviott's face flushed.

"You are a foolish child," he said, under his breath. Whether Mary caught the words or not he could not tell, but in a gentler tone she added, as she was passing through the doorway, "I think, however, I should tell you that no one—my sister, of course not—*no one* knows of my coming here to-day."

Mr. Cheviott bowed.

"I am glad to hear it," he said, with what Mary imagined to be extreme irony.

He crossed the hall with her, and opened the large door himself. But Mary did not look at him as she passed out. And, when she had got some way down the carriage-drive, in sight of the clump of oak-trees, she burst into a flood of bitter tears. Tears that Mr. Cheviott suspected, though he did not see them.

"Poor child," he said, as he returned to his study, "I trust she will meet no one in the park. Those gossiping servants—— Well, *surely* I can never have a more wretched piece of work to go through than this! What a mean, despicable snob she thinks me!" he laughed, bitterly. "Why, I wonder, is it the fate of some people to be constantly doing other people's dirty work? I have had my share of it, Heaven

knows; but I think I am growing quite reckless to what people think of me. What eyes that child has—and how she must love that sister of hers! If it had been *she* that Arthur had made a fool of himself about——”

CHAPTER V.

“ DOING ” ROMARY.

“ She told the tale with bated breath—

‘ A sad old story ; is it true ? ’ ”

THERE was no good, there seldom is any, in crying about it. And Mary’s tears were those rather of anger and indignation than of sorrow. The sorrow was there, but it lay a good deal lower down, and she had no intention of letting anyone suspect its existence, nor that of her present discomfort, in any way. So she soon left off crying, and tried to rally again the

temporarily scattered forces of her philosophy.

“Well,” she reflected, “it has been a failure, and perhaps it was a mistake. I must put it away among the good intentions that had better have remained such. I must try to think I have at worst done Lilius’s cause no harm—honestly I don’t think I have—nothing that I could say would move that man one way or the other. And any way I meant well—my darling!—I would do it all over again for you, would I not? My poor Lily—to think how happy she might have been but for *him*. As for what he thinks of me I do not care, deliberately and decidedly I do not care, though just now it makes me feel hot,”—for the colour had mounted in her face even while she was asserting her indifference—“or perhaps, to be quite truthful, I should say I shall not care, very soon I shall not,

I know. I shall not even care what he says of me—except—it would be rather dreadful if Liliás ever heard of it! but I do not think he will ever speak of it—he has what people call the instincts of a gentleman, I suppose."

Mary walked on, she was close to the lodge gates now. Suddenly a quick clatter behind her made her look round—a girl on horseback followed by a groom was passing her, and as Mary glanced up she caught sight of the bright sweet face of Alys Cheviott. One instant she turned in Mary's direction, and, it *seemed* to Mary—conscious of red eyes and a half guilty sensation of having no business within the gates—eyed her curiously. But she did not stop, or even slacken her pace. "She cannot have recognized me," said Mary.

"And to-morrow," she thought, with a sigh, half of relief, half of despair, "I

shall be home again, and Liliás will be asking me if I came across any of the Romary people, or heard anything about Arthur Beverley."

And when she got back to Uxley and Mrs. Greville's afternoon tea, she had to say how very much she had enjoyed her walk, and how pretty Romary Park looked from the road.

"Only," repeated Mrs. Greville, "I do so wish the Cheviotts had been away, and that I could have taken you all to see through the house and gardens and everything," and Mary agreed that it was a great pity the Cheviotts had not been away, thinking in her heart that it was perhaps a greater pity than Mrs. Greville had any idea of.

How seldom to-morrow fulfils the predictions of to-day! On Wednesday evening Mary was so sure she was going back

to Hathercourt on Thursday morning, and on Thursday morning a letter from Liliás upset all her plans. It had been arranged that Mr. Western should walk over to Uxley on Thursday to lunch there, and be driven home with Mary in Mrs. Greville’s pony-carriage; but Wednesday had brought news to Hathercourt of the visit of a school inspector, and Mr. Western’s absence was not to be thought of.

“So,” wrote Liliás, “mother and I have persuaded him to go on Friday instead, if it will suit Mrs. Greville equally well. If not, we shall expect you home to-morrow, but do stay till Friday, if you can, Mary, for I can see that poor papa has been rather looking forward to the little change of a day at Uxley, and he has so few changes.”

Mary was longing to be home again, but her longings were not the question,

and as Friday proved to be equally convenient for Mrs. Greville, the matter was decided as Liliás wished.

“But you look rather melancholy about it, Mary,” said Mrs. Greville. “Are you home-sick already?”

Mary smiled. Mr. Morpeth was looking at her with some curiosity.

“Not exactly,” she said, honestly.

She glanced up and saw a smile pass round the table.

“What are you all laughing at me for?” she said, smiling herself.

“You are so dreadfully honest,” said Mrs. Greville.

“And unsophisticated, I suppose,” said Mary, “to own to the possibility of anything so old-fashioned as home-sickness.”

“It must be rather a nice feeling, I think,” said Mr. Morpeth. “I mean to say it must be nice to have one place in

the world one really longs for. I have never known what that was—we were all at school for so many years after our father’s death—and since we have been together we have been knocking about so, there was no chance of feeling anywhere home.”

“It must be dreadful to be home-sick when one is very ill and has small chance of ever seeing home again,” said Cecilia Morpeth. “We used to see so much of that at Mentone and those places. Invalids who had not many days to live, just praying for home. Do you remember that poor young Brooke, last Winter, Frances?”

“*That’s* it,” exclaimed the elder Miss Morpeth, emphatically.

Everybody stared at her.

“What *is* the matter? What are you talking about, Frances?” asked her brother and sister.

Miss Morpeth laughed.

“You must have thought I was going out of my mind,” she said, “but it has bothered me so, and when Cecilia mentioned the Brookes, it flashed before me in a moment.”

“*What?*” repeated Cecilia.

“The likeness—don’t you remember we were talking about it, last night, in our own room? A curious likeness in Miss Western’s face to some one—I could not tell who. Don’t you see it, Cecilia? Not to Basil Brooke, but to the younger brother, Anselm—the one that used to ride with us.”

“Yes,” said Cecilia, “I see what you mean. It is especially when Miss Western looks at all anxious or thoughtful.”

“It is curious,” said Mary. “If we had any cousins, I should fancy these Brookes you are talking of must be relations. My eldest brother’s name is Basil,

and the second one is George Anselm, and my mother's name was Brooke. But I think she told me all her family had died out—any way, your friends can only be very distant relations.”

“But the likeness,” said Miss Morpeth. “It is quite romantic, isn't it? I suppose you are like your mother, Miss Western?”

“Yes,” said Mary.

“It is to be hoped the likeness goes no further than the face,” said Cecilia, thoughtlessly. “These Brookes are frightfully consumptive. I beg your pardon,” she added, seeing that Mary looked grave, “I should not have said that.”

“I was not thinking of ourselves,” said Mary. “I know *we* are not consumptive. I was trying to remember if I had ever heard mother speak of any such cousins.”

“The consumption comes from their mother's side,” said Miss Morpeth. “I

remember their aunt, Mrs. Brabazon, telling me so. She was a Brooke, and she was as strong as possible."

"Basil Brooke is dead," said Mr. Morpeth. "I saw his death in the *Times* last week, poor fellow!"

"I will tell mother about them," said Mary, and then the conversation went off to other subjects.

An hour or two later, when Mary and the Morpeths were sitting in the drawing-room together, and Mrs. Greville was attending to her housekeeping for the day, she suddenly re-appeared, with a beaming face.

"Frances, Mary, Cecilia," she exclaimed, "*such* a piece of good luck! Mr. Petre, Mr. Cheviott's agent, has just been calling here to see Mr. Greville about some parish business, and I happened to say to him

that I had friends with me here who had such a wish to see Romary. And what *do* you think? Mr. Cheviott and his sister *are* away! They went yesterday evening to pay a visit, somewhere in the neighbourhood, for three days. And Mr. Petre was so nice about it—he says he has perfect *carte blanche* about showing the house when they are away, and Mrs. Golding is always delighted to do the honours. So it is all fixed—we are to go this afternoon—we must have luncheon a little earlier than usual. So glad you are not going home to-day, Mary.”

Mary *felt*—afterwards she trusted she had not *looked*—aghast. What evil genii had conspired to bring about such a scheme? To go to see Romary—of all places on earth, the last she ever wished to re-enter—to go to admire the posses-

sions of the man who had done her more injury and caused her deeper mortification than she had ever endured before!

“Oh, Mrs. Greville,” she exclaimed, hastily. “It is very good of you, but I don’t think I care about going—you won’t mind if I stay at home?”

“If you stay at home!” said Mrs. Greville, in amazement. “Of *course* I should mind. I made the plan quite as much for you as for Frances and Cecilia; and only yesterday—or the day before, was it?—you seemed so interested in Romary, and so anxious to see it, you were asking ever so many questions about it. I did not think you were so changeable.”

Mary’s face flushed.

“I did not mean to be changeable, or to vex you, dear Mrs. Greville,” she began, “only——”

“Only what?”

Mary had left her seat and come over to where Mrs. Greville was standing.

“It is a very silly reason I was going to give,” she said, in a low voice, trying to smile. “You remember my saying before how *very* much I dislike that Mr. Cheviott.”

Mrs. Greville could not help laughing.

“Is that all?” she said. “Come now, Mary, I had no idea you could be so silly. I have always looked upon you as such a model of good sense. I began to think there must be some mystery you had not explained to me—about Liliass’s affairs, of course I mean,” she added, in a whisper, glancing at Mary with re-awakened curiosity in her eyes.

Mary kept her countenance.

“It is just as I said,” she replied. “I can’t give you any better reason for not

wanting to go than my dislike to that man."

"Very well, then, you *must* come. That might prevent your liking to see *him*; it need not prevent your liking to see his house. Your not coming would quite spoil our pleasure."

Mary hesitated. Suddenly there flashed into her mind some of Lilius's last words of warning.

"Whatever you do, Mary," she had said, "don't let Mrs. Greville get it into her head that there has been anything mortifying to us—that Arthur has behaved ill, I mean. I couldn't stand that being said."

And Mary turned to Mrs. Greville with a smile.

"Very well," she said. "I won't be silly, and I will go."

"That's all right," said Mrs. Greville,

and Mary wished she could have said so too.

After all, why not? It was entirely a matter of personal feeling on her part; there was nothing unladylike or unusual in her going with the others to see the show house of the neighbourhood; and yet the bare thought of her doing so by any possibility coming to Mr. Cheviott's ears made her cheeks burn.

“That horrible man-servant!” she said to herself—“supposing he recognises me!”

But there was no good in “supposings.” She determined to make the best of the unavoidable, though it was impossible altogether to refrain from fruitless regrets that her return home had been delayed.

Nothing came in the way of the expedition. The afternoon turned out very fine, remarkably fine and mild for February, and the little party that set out from the

Vicarage would have struck any casual observer as cheerful and light-hearted in the extreme.

“Do you care about this sort of thing?” said Mr. Morpeth to Mary, when, in the course of the walk, they happened to fall a little behind the others.

“About what?” said Mary, absently. Her thoughts had been far away from her companions; she now recalled them with some effort.

“Going to see other people’s houses,” replied the young man. “I hate it, though I have had more than my share of it, knocking about from place to place, as we have been doing for so long.”

“Why do you hate it?” inquired Mary, with more interest. The mere fact of Mr. Morpeth’s aversion to such expeditions in general seemed congenial, smarting as she was with her own sore repugnance to

this one in particular. And even a shadow of sympathy in her present discomfort was attractive to Mary to-day.

Mr. Morpeth kicked a pebble or two out of his path with a sort of boyish impatience which made Mary smile.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he replied, vaguely, “I always think it’s a snobbish sort of thing to do, going poking about people’s rooms, and all that. And if it’s a pretty house, it makes one envious, and if it’s ugly, what’s the good of seeing it?”

Mary laughed.

“I like seeing old houses—really old houses,” she said. “Not ruins, but an old house still habitable enough to enable one to fancy what it must have really been like ‘once upon a time.’”

“Yes,” said Mr. Morpeth, “I know how you mean. But even that interest goes off very quickly. We once lived near an

old place that nearly took my breath away with awe and admiration the first time I went through it. But very soon it became as common-place as anything, and I hated to hear people go off into rhapsodies about it."

"What a pity!" said Mary. "I don't know that I envy you people who have travelled everywhere and seen everything. You don't enjoy little things as we do who have seen nothing."

"But you don't enjoy going to see this stupid place to-day," persisted Mr. Morpeth. "I know you don't, for I was in the drawing-room this morning when you were all talking about it; I came in behind Mrs. Greville, and sat down in the corner, though you didn't see me."

"Then if you heard all that was said you must have heard my reason for dis-

liking to go to see Romary,” said Mary, in a tone of some annoyance.

“Yes,” said Mr. Morpeth, coolly, “I did. I wonder why you dislike that unfortunate Mr. What’s-his-name so? For before you came, Mrs. Greville entertained us with a wonderful story about a ball and a very grand gentleman who never looks at young ladies at all, having quite succumbed to——”

“Mr. Morpeth,” exclaimed Mary, stopping short and turning round on her companion with scarlet cheeks, “I shall be *very* angry if you speak like that, and I don’t think Mrs. Greville should have——”

“Please don’t be angry. I didn’t mean to vex you, and Mrs. Greville was not telling any secrets,” said Mr. Morpeth. “Only I have been wondering ever since why you should have taken such a

dislike to the poor man. You must be very unlike other girls, Miss Western?"

He looked at her with a sort of half innocent, half mischievous curiosity, and somehow Mary could not keep up her indignation.

"Well, perhaps I am," she said, good-naturedly. "All the same, Mr. Morpeth, you have got *quite* a wrong idea about why I dislike Mr. Cheviott. Don't let us talk about him any more."

"*I* don't want to talk about him, I'm sure," said Mr. Morpeth. "I only wish he didn't live here, or hadn't a house which people insist on dragging me to see. *I* have no other ill-will at the unfortunate man."

"Only you won't leave off talking about him," said Mary, "and we are close to Romary now. See, that is the lodge gate—on there just past the bend in the road."

“Oh, you have been here before. I forgot,” said her companion, simply. But innocently as he spoke, his remark sent the blood flying again to Mary’s cheeks.

“What shall I do if that horrible footman opens the door?” she said to herself.

But things seldom turn out as bad as we picture them—or, rather, they seldom turn out as we picture them at all. The horrible footman did not make his appearance—men-servants of no kind were visible—the house seemed already in a half state of *déshabillé*; only old Mrs. Golding, the housekeeper, came forward, with many apologies and regrets that she had not known before of Mrs. Greville’s and her friends’ coming. “Mr. Petre had only just sent word,” and the carpets were up in the morning-room and library! So sorry, she chatted on, but she was thankful to take advantage of her master’s

and Miss Cheviott's absence, even for a day or two, to get some cleaning done.

"For a house like this takes a deal," she added, pathetically, appealing to Mrs. Greville, who answered good-humouredly that to be sure it must.

"But the best rooms are not dismantled, I suppose?" she inquired. "The great round drawing-room and the picture-gallery with the arched roof? Just like a church," she observed, parenthetically, to her companions; "that is what I want you so much to see. And the old part of the house, we are sure to see that, and it is really so curious."

There was no "cleaning" going on in the great drawing-room, and Mrs. Golding led the way to its splendours with unconcealed satisfaction.] It was much like other

big drawing-rooms, with an even greater air of formality and unusedness than is often seen.

Mary, who was not learned in old china, its chief attraction, turned away with little interest, and wished Mrs. Greville would hasten her movements.

“What splendid old damask these curtains are,” she was saying to Mrs. Golding. “One could not buy stuff like this now-a-days.”

“No, indeed, ma’am,” said the house-keeper, shaking her head. “They must have been made many a long year ago. But they’re getting to look very dingy—Miss Alys’s always asking Mr. Cheviott to re-furnish this room. But it must have been handsome in its day—I remember being here once when I was a girl and seeing it all lighted up. I did think it splendid.”

"There are some *very* old rooms, are there not?" said Mary.

"Yes, miss, the tapestry rooms," said Mrs. Golding. "There's a stair leading up to them that opens out of the picture-gallery—the only other way to them is through Mr. Cheviott's own rooms, and he always keeps that way locked, as no one else uses it. The stair runs right down to the side door on the terrace, so it's a convenient way of getting in from the garden," continued the communicative housekeeper. "But there's not many in the house cares to go near those rooms, for they say the middle one's haunted."

"Dear me, this is getting interesting," said Mr. Morpeth. "What or whom is it haunted by, pray?"

Mrs. Golding looked up at him sharply, then with a slight smile she shook her head.

"You would only make fun of it if I told you, sir," she said, "and somehow one doesn't care to have old stories made fun of, silly though they may be."

"No," said Mary, "one doesn't. I think you are quite right," and the old woman looked pleased.

"You won't prevent my seeing the haunted room, though you won't tell me its story," said Mr. Morpeth, good-naturedly. So Mrs. Golding led the way.

They passed along the arched picture-gallery, which in itself merited Mrs. Greville's praises, though the pictures it contained were neither many nor remarkable.

"I like this room," said Mary, approvingly. "It is much less common-place than the drawing-room—not that I have seen many great houses," she added, with a smile, to Mr. Morpeth who was walking

beside her, "but this is a room one would remember wherever one went."

"Yes," said Mr. Morpeth. "It is a room with a character of its own, certainly. Frances will be calling it romantic and picturesque and all the rest of it. I am so tired of all those words."

"I am afraid you are tired of most things," said Mary. "See what an advantage we dwellers at home have over you travelled people!"

Her spirits were rising. So far there had been nothing at all in the expedition to arouse her fears, and she began to think they had been exaggerated.

"Which is the way to the haunted room?" asked Mr. Morpeth, when they were all tired of admiring the picture-gallery.

Mrs. Golding replied by opening a door at the further end of the room from that

at which they had entered. It led into a little vestibule up one side of which ran a narrow staircase.

“Up that stair, sir,” she said to Mr. Morpeth, “you get into a passage with two doors, one of them leads into the new part of the house and one into the old tapestry rooms—it is one of those rooms that is haunted.”

“Let us see if we can guess which it is,” exclaimed Mr. Morpeth, springing up the staircase. His sister and Mrs. Greville followed him, but Mary lingered a little behind.

“What is the story of the haunted room?” she said, in a low voice, to the housekeeper.

Mrs. Golding smiled. She had somehow taken a liking to this quietly-dressed, quietly-spoken young lady, with the pretty eyes and pleasant voice.

“To tell you the truth, miss,” she answered, “I do not very rightly know it myself. It was something about a lady from foreign parts that was brought here, sorely against her will, by one of the old lords—I think I have heard said they were once lords—of Romary. He wanted her to marry him, but she would not. Whether he forced her to give in or not I can’t tell, but the end of it was she killed herself—I fancy she threw herself out of the window of the room where he had imprisoned her. And since then they say she is to be seen there now and then.”

“Was it very long ago?”

“I couldn’t say. It was at the time, I know, when there was wars in foreign parts, and that was how the squire of Romary had found the lady. Miss Alys knows all the story—that’s our young

lady. Miss Cheviott I should say. It is a sad enough story any way.”

“Yes,” said Mary, “ghost stories always are, I think. It is queer that the people who have been the most miserable in this world are always the ones who are supposed not to be able to rest without returning to it.”

But just then a voice from above interrupted them.

“Miss Western,” it said, “do come up. This is the jolliest place of the whole house.”

So Mary ran up the staircase. Mr. Morpeth was waiting for her at the top.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HAUNTED ROOM.

“Startled by her own thoughts, she looked around :
There was no fair fiend near her.”

SHELLEY.

IT was really a very respectable attempt
at a haunted room.

“Something like, isn’t it ?” said Mr. Morpeth, looking round him with approval, while Miss Morpeth shivered, and declared she would not care to spend a night in it, and Miss Cecilia laughed at her and said she would like nothing better than to stay there till to-morrow morning, to see what was to be seen.

"Nonsense, my dear," said Mrs. Greville. "You would be as frightened as possible long before it got dark."

"She would be in hysterics in half an hour," said her brother, politely.

"I am *sure* I wouldn't," protested Cecilia. "Miss Western, you wouldn't be afraid to spend a night here, would you?"

"I don't know," said Mary, doubtfully. "I almost think I should be. Those faces in the tapestry are so ghostly. I suppose," she went on, simply, "if I *had* to stay here—I mean if there were any good reason for it, I should not be frightened—but I shouldn't feel inclined to try it just as a test of bravery."

"As a piece of foolish bravado, *I* should call it," said Mrs. Greville.

"It would be an awkward place to be shut up in," said Mrs. Golding, "for the door is in the tapestry, you see, ladies,"—

she closed it as she spoke—"and it opens with a spring, and unless one knows the exact spot to press, it would be very difficult to find. The other door, which leads into the new part of the house, is hidden in the same way."

She crossed the room, and, almost without hesitation, pressed a spot in the wall, and a door flew open. It led into another room, something like the first, but rather more modern in its furniture. All the party pressed forward.

"There is nothing particular to see here," said Mrs. Golding, "but this room opens again into the white corridor, where my master's own rooms are. There is a very pretty view from the window at the end, if you would come this way, and we can get round to the front of the house again."

A sudden impulse seized Mary.

"Mrs. Greville," she said, "I would like to go out into the garden by the door at the foot of the stair we came up. Mayn't I go back? I will meet you at the front of the house."

"Very well," said Mrs. Greville. "You are such an odd girl, Mary," she added, in a lower voice, "I suppose your dislike to Mr. Cheviott prevents your liking to see his rooms!"

Mary laughed, but coloured a little too.

"Then I'll meet you at the front of the house," she said, as she turned away.

"Let me go with you," put in Mr. Morpeth—the others, under Mrs. Golding's guidance, had already passed on—"it wouldn't do for you to go prowling about those ghostly rooms all by yourself, Miss Western. Who knows what might happen to you?"

Mary laughed again—this time more heartily.

“It’s not dark enough yet to be frightened,” she said, as they re-entered the haunted chamber, where already the heavy old hangings had toned down the afternoon light into dimness.

“Hardly,” said Mr. Morpeth, carelessly, stepping forward to the window as he spoke. Mary was following him when a slight sound arrested her.

“Mr. Morpeth,” she exclaimed, “it is to be hoped we can get out by the other door, for the one we have just come in by has shut behind us ; I heard it click ; it is my fault. I never thought about its being a spring door, and I let it swing to.”

She looked startled and a little pale. Mr. Morpeth was surprised at her seeming to take it so seriously, and felt half inclined to banter her.

"We never meant to go back by the door we came in by," he said. "What would have been the good of that? We'll find the other in a minute—sure to; don't look so aghast, Miss Western. At the worst we can ring the bells and alarm the house till some one comes to let us out. You're surely not afraid that we shall have to get out by the window?"

As he spoke he crossed over to the side of the room where, to their knowledge, the second door *was*, if only they could find it! Mr. Morpeth, at first, began feeling about in a vague way, as if expecting to light upon the spring by a happy accident. But no such result followed; he began to look a little more thoughtful.

"Let's see," he said, consideringly, "whereabouts was it we first came into the room?"

Mary stepped backwards close to the

wall, and then moved slowly along, keeping her back to it.

“It must have been about here, I think,” she said, stopping short. “I remember the first thing I caught sight of was that cabinet, and it seemed just opposite me; and Mrs. Greville standing in front of it seemed to shut out that narrow pane of the window. Yes,” as Mr. Morpeth put himself in the position she described—“yes, she was standing just there; the door *must* be hereabouts.”

They turned to search more systematically, but in vain. Peer as they would into every square inch of the musty tapestry hangings within a certain radius, feel as they would, up and down, right and left, higher up than Mrs. Golding could possibly have reached, lower down than any door within the memory of man ever

locked; it was all in vain. Then they looked at each other.

“It must be a spring pressing inwards—flat on the surface,” said Mr. Morpeth. “I thought there would have been a little knob of some kind. However, let’s try again.”

He moved his hand slowly along the wall, pressing carefully, anxiously endeavouring to detect the slightest inequality or indentation, and Mary followed his example till their patience was exhausted. Then again they stopped and looked at each other.

“Would it be any good trying to find the spring of the other door?” said Mary, at last.

“I don’t fancy it would,” said Mr. Morpeth. “You see, we’re quite in the dark as to what sort of spring it is; we may have touched it twenty times, but not

pushed or pressed it the right way. Don't you think we'd better just not bother for a little? They're sure to miss us before long, and then that old party will hunt us up."

But Mary looked by no means disposed to take things so philosophically.

"I don't know that they *will* miss us so quickly," she said. "It will take them some time to go all over the front of the house, and if they don't find us in the grounds they are sure just to think we have walked on. I am sure Mrs. Greville will think so, any way; she always takes things so comfortably," she added, with an uneasy reflection that Mrs. Greville would probably be rejoicing at the success of her amiable scheme for throwing herself and "young Morpeth" together. "I *wish* I had not left the others."

Mr. Morpeth smiled.

"I really think you are wasting a great deal of unnecessary energy on our misadventure," he said. "*I* don't see anything so very desperate about it. If we were in a box now, like that girl at Modena, Guinevere—no, Geneviève—no, bless me, I can't remember. You know whom I mean—we *might* be rather uneasy. But at the *very* worst we cannot be left here more than an hour or two. I daresay the housekeeper will be coming back to look for us immediately, for she will know how awkward these doors are."

"Yes," said Mary, "I do think that is not unlikely. She did not hear us speak of going back to the gardens though, did she? she had gone on in front."

"But she is pretty sure to miss us, and ask what had become of us—she's not a

stupid old lady, by any means. Just let's wait here comfortably a few minutes, and see if she doesn't come."

Mary tried to take his advice, but as the minutes passed she grew more and more *uncomfortable*.

"I say," exclaimed Mr. Morpeth, "supposing we try to make ourselves heard somehow: I never thought of that. Very likely there are offices—pantries, or kitchens, and so on under these rooms. There's no bell, but supposing we jump on the floor and scream—I'll jump, if you will be so good as to scream—some one will be sure to hear us and rush up to see what's happening in the haunted room."

But at this proposal Mary grew literally white with anxiety.

"Oh, *please* don't, Mr. Morpeth," she said, so beseechingly that the young man

looked at her with more concern than he had yet shown.

“What a queer girl she must be to take it to heart so!” he said to himself.

“*Please* don’t,” she repeated. “It would make such a to-do. I should be so dreadfully annoyed—oh, *please* don’t.”

“That horrible footman” was the great terror in her mind; “if he came up and saw me he would be sure to tell his master. What would Mr. Cheviott think of me if he heard of my being here, prying about his house the very day after?”

“Very well. *I’m* very comfortable. I’m quite content to wait till some one comes to let us out,” said Mr. Morpeth. “It was you, Miss Western, that was in such a hurry.”

Which was true enough. Mary did not know what to say—only her uneasiness in-

creased. It began to grow dusk too—outside among the trees it was getting to look decidedly dusk.

“What shall we do?” she exclaimed, at last, in a sort of desperation. “Evidently they are not missing us, and will not do so till they get home, and then there will be *such* a fuss! Oh, Mr. Morpeth,” she went on, as a new idea struck her, “do you think you could possibly get out of the window?”

She said it so simply, and was evidently so much in earnest, that Mr. Morpeth gave up for once his habit of looking at the ludicrous side, and set to work to discover how this last suggestion could be carried out. The window was much more easy to deal with than the doors. It opened at once, and, leaning over, Mr. Morpeth descried a little ledge below it, leading to

the top of the porch above the side-door into the shrubbery.

“I can easily get out,” he said, turning back to Mary, “but once I am out what do you want me to do? You don’t want any fuss, but I must tell somebody to come and get you out.”

“Oh, yes, of course—if you could find Mrs. Greville and ask her to tell the house-keeper of the door’s having shut to, she would come and open it,” said Mary. “If you could just tell her in a matter-of-fact way, you know. What I don’t want is a great rush of all the servants and people about the place to see me locked up here; it would be so uncomfortable. I’ll wait here quite patiently once I know you’ve gone, for you’ll be sure to find them.”

“I’ll do my best,” said Mr. Morpeth, quietly, “and of course if I *should* break

my neck or my arms or anything, there will be the satisfaction of knowing it was in a good cause."

Mary started forward.

"You don't mean that there is really any risk for you," she exclaimed. "No, I am sure there isn't," she continued, after looking out of the window, and examining it for herself, "of course, if there was, I shouldn't want you to go. You are laughing at me because you think me very silly—I am very sorry, but I can't help it. I do *so* wish I hadn't come here—I wish I could get out of the window too!"

"No, indeed, it would not be safe for you at all," said Mr. Morpeth, hastily, concealing his private opinion that the feat was not so easy as it looked. "I am a good climber and I've had plenty of practice. It is nothing for me, but it would be quite different for you—promise me, Miss

Western, you will not try to get out of the window while I am away. I shall be as quick as I can, but I may not be able to find the others all at once."

"Very well," said Mary. "I do promise. Not that I ever meant to get out of the window, I assure you."

Mr. Morpeth clambered out successfully. Mary watched him groping along the ledge, holding on first by a projecting window sash, then by a water-pipe, then by what she could not tell—somehow or other he had made his way to the roof of the door porch, and was hidden from her sight. But, in a minute, a whistle and a low call of "all right" satisfied her as to his safety.

"He is very good-natured," thought Mary. "He called out softly on purpose not to attract attention. What a silly girl he must think me, to make such a fuss

about such a simple thing ! But I can't help it."

She drew back from the window and sat down on one of the straight-backed, tapestry-cushioned chairs, and began to calculate how long she would probably have to wait. Ten minutes at most—it could not take longer to run round to the front of the house and find Mrs. Golding.

"They will come back by that door," said Mary, to herself, directing her eyes towards the invisible entrance by which she and Mr. Morpeth had returned to the haunted room. "How glad I shall be when I see it open ! How I wish I had a watch ! It would pass the time to count the minutes till they come—but I could hardly see the minute hand on a watch even now. How dark it is getting ! It is those great trees outside—in Summer,

no light at all can get in here I should think.

She got up and turned again to the window, fancying that looking out would be a little less gloomy than sitting staring at the old furniture and the shadowy figures on the walls, growing more and more weird and gruesome as the light faded. But, standing there at the window, there returned to her mind the tragic story of which Mrs. Golding had given her the outlines, and, despite her endeavours to think of something else, her imagination persisted in filling in the details. "She had thrown herself out of the window in despair," Mrs. Golding had told of the unhappy prisoner, and Mary recalled it with a slight shudder.

Was it much to be wondered at? Anyone would grow desperate shut up within these four gloomy walls—

gloomy now, and gloomy then, no doubt, for the tapestry was *very* old—older, probably, than the date of the story—and the room had ever since been left much as it was at that time. It was a ghastly story, as much for what had preceded the final tragedy as for the catastrophe itself.

“It is so *very* horrible to think of anyone’s having been shut up in this very room for days, and weeks, and months, perhaps,” thought Mary. “And to think that her only way out of it was to marry a man she hated! Still, whoever she was, she must have been brave; the only inconsistent part of the story is her being supposed to haunt the place she must have had such a horror of. Dear me, how dark it is getting!—how I do wish they would come, and how I wish I had not heard that story!”

Mary left the window again, and sat

down on one of the hard high-backed chairs. In spite of her anxiety and excitement, she was growing very tired, and once or twice she almost felt as if she were getting sleepy. But she was determined not to yield to this.

“It would be far worse if I fell asleep, and woke to find myself all in the dark,” she said to herself. “If I have to stay all night, I must keep awake, and, indeed, it begins to look very like having to stay all night. What can have become of Mr. Morpeth? I am sure he has been gone half an hour.”

She listened till her ears were strained, but there was no sound. Then again the confused, sleepy feeling came over her; she dozed unconsciously for a minute or two, to be awakened suddenly by what in her sleep had seemed a loud noise. Mary started up, her heart beating violently,

but she heard nothing for a moment or two. Then there came a faint creaking sound, as of some one coming up the staircase and along the passage outside. It was not the side from which she was looking for assistance, and, besides, whoever it was was approaching in perfect silence.

“Mr. Morpeth would be sure to call out, if it was he,” she reflected; “besides, Mrs. Golding would be with him, and they would come the other way. Who can it be? Oh! supposing—just *supposing* the ghost were to come in, what should I do? I should always be told it was a dream; but I am not dreaming. And *something* must have been seen, otherwise there would not be the story about it.”

All this flashed through her mind in an instant. She got up from her chair with a vague intention of escaping, hiding her-

self somewhere, anywhere, but sat down again, as the steps came nearer and nearer, with a feeling of hopelessness. How could she escape? Where could she hide herself? There was no cupboard or recess, not even a curtain, in the bare, half-furnished room; she must just wait where she was, whatever happened, and, as if fascinated, poor Mary sat gazing on that part of the wall where she knew the door to be. Another moment—it seemed to her hours—and she heard the slight click of the concealed spring, and, thank Heavens, it was no ghost in flowing white, but a gentleman in a great-coat! Thus much Mary could discern, dusk though it was, even at the first glance, to her inexpressible relief.

“Mr. Morpeth,” she exclaimed, “is it you? Oh, I am so thankful! But why——”

The voice that interrupted her was not Mr. Morpeth's.

"Who is there? Is it you, Mrs. Golding? What is the matter?" exclaimed the some one whose approach had so terrified her.

An instant's pause; Mary's wits, beginning to recover themselves, were all but scattered again as a frightful suspicion dawned upon her. Was she dreaming, *could* it be that her very worst misgiving was realised? Who was it standing in frowning bewilderment before her? Ghost, indeed—at that moment it seemed to her she would rather have faced twenty ghosts than the living man before her.

"Mr. Cheviott!" she ejaculated, feebly, hardly conscious of speaking.

Mr. Cheviott came forward a little, but cautiously, and in evident astonishment and perplexity. Something in the tone

of the half whisper struck him as familiar, though it was too dark for him to distinguish at once anything but the general outline of poor Mary's figure.

"Who is it? I don't understand; does Mrs. Golding know of your being here?" he asked, confusedly, with a vague idea that possibly the mysterious visitor was some friend of the housekeeper's.

"No—oh, yes, I mean," replied Mary; "I got locked in by mistake, and—and——"

There was an end for the time of all explanation; Mary burst into unheroic tears; but not before an exclamation, to her ears fraught with inexpressible meaning, had reached her from Mr. Cheviott.

"Miss Western, *you* here!" was all he said, but it was enough.

Though from the first of his entrance she had had no hope of escaping unper-

ceived, yet the hearing his recognition expressed in words seemed to make things worse, and for the moment exaggerated almost beyond endurance the consciousness of her ignominious position. She cried as much from a sort of indignation at circumstances as from nervousness or timidity.

Mr. Cheviott stood silent and motionless. Wild ideas were hurrying through his brain to the exclusion for the time of all reasonable conjecture. Had she been locked up here since the day before? Had she come with a frantic idea of winning him over even now to approve of an engagement between Arthur and her sister? If not, what *was* she doing here? And now that he had discovered her, what could he do or say that would not add to her distress?

Suddenly Mary looked up. Her tears

somehow or other had restored her self-control; the very shame she felt at Mr. Cheviott's hearing her sobs re-acted so as to give her confidence.

"Why should I be ashamed? It is very natural I should cry after all the worry I have had the last few days; and who has caused it all? Who has broken Lily's heart and made us all miserable? Why should I care what such a man as that thinks of me?"

She left off crying, and got up from the chair on which she had sunk down at the climax of her terror. She turned to Mr. Cheviott, and said calmly, though not without the remains of an uncontrollable quaver in her voice,

"If you will be so good as to open the door, I should very much like to go."

Mr. Cheviott took up the cue with con-

siderable relief. Any amount of formality was better than tears.

“Certainly,” he said, quietly. Then, almost to his own astonishment, the ludicrous side of the position suddenly presenting itself to him, a spirit of mischief incited him to add, “you must allow, Miss Western, *I* am in no way to blame for this disagreeable adventure of yours. And, if you will pardon my asking you, I must confess before I let you out I should very much like to know how you got in.”

Mary flamed up instantly.

“You have no right,” she began,—“no right,” she was going to say, “to ask me anything I have not chosen to tell you,” but she stopped short. She was in Mr. Cheviott’s own house—how could she possibly refuse to tell him how she had got there! “I beg your pardon,” she said instead. “I—I came here with Mrs.

Greville and some people who wanted to see the house. *I* did not want to come," she could not resist adding, with a curious little flash of defiance, "but I could not help it."

"Ah! indeed, I understand," said Mr. Cheviott, turning to open the door, but to which part of her speech his observation was addressed Mary was left in ignorance.

Mr. Cheviott stopped.

"Which way do you wish to go out?" he asked.

"Out to the garden, if you please," said Mary, eagerly. "That is the way Mr. Morpeth—the gentleman that was with me, I mean—will be coming back. At least, I don't know," she went on, growing confused; "it depends on where he finds the housekeeper. But any way, I would rather meet them all outside."

"How on earth did 'the gentleman that

was with her ' get out ?" thought Mr. Cheviott—" or was it through some foolery of his that she got locked in ?" But he was determined to ask no more questions.

He turned again to the wall, pressed the concealed spring without an instant's hesitation, and the door flew open—flew open, and Mary, without a glance behind her, flew out.

CHAPTER VII.

MARY TELLS STORIES.

FLORIZEL—"Fortune speed us!—

Thus we set on, Camillo, to the sea-side."

CAMILLO—"The swifter speed the better."

Winter's Tale.

SHE flew out of the room, across the passage, down the little stair, and out at the door, still standing slightly ajar, for a moment thinking of nothing but the delight of being liberated at last. But it was dusk outside among the trees, and her hesitation which way to go recalled her to herself. She stopped short, and then turned back again.

"I should have thanked him. He really

must think me mad," she said to herself, with a hot flush of shame, hardly knowing what she ought to do.

But she was not long left in doubt. Mr. Cheviott had followed her downstairs; he was standing at the door.

"I am ashamed of not thanking you for letting me out," she said, hastily.

"I hardly see that I could have done less," he replied, drily. "I merely followed you now to direct you how to get round to the front, as I believe you wish. You must keep that path to the left till it meets a wider one, which will bring you out at the foot of a flight of stone steps. These will take you up to the side terrace, and you can then easily see your way to the front of the house. It is not really dark yet; it is only the trees here which make it seem so, even in Winter. They are so thick."

"Thank you," said Mary. "I am very much obliged to you, and I should have said so before, but—I did not think I was so silly—the feeling of being shut up in that room must have made me forget, it was so horrible," and she gave a little shiver.

Mr. Cheviott stepped forward a little, but it was too dark for Mary to see the concern in his eyes.

"Would you like me to go with you till you meet your friends?" he said, very gently.

"Oh, *no*, thank you," exclaimed Mary, with great vehemence.

Mr. Cheviott drew back.

"I see," he said, with the slightly satirical tone Mary seemed to know so well and hated so devoutly. "It is bad enough to be still in the precincts of the ogre's castle, but the presence of the ogre

himself is quite too much for your nerves. Good evening, Miss Western."

He raised his hat and re-entered the house before Mary had time to reply. She stood still for a second.

"Have I been rude to him again?" she said to herself, with a little compunction. "However, it really does not matter. No two people could dislike and despise each other more thoroughly than he and I do. I could never, in any circumstances, have liked him; but still, for Lily's sake, I could have been civil to him. But *now!* I only hope, oh, ever so earnestly, that I shall never see him again—and what he thinks or does not think of me really is of less than no consequence."

Nevertheless, the thought of the afternoon's adventure made her cheeks tingle hotly, and as she hurried on as fast as she could in the uncertain light, Mary Western

seemed strangely unlike her usual philosophical self. She even seemed to find a relief to her irritation in trampling unnecessarily on the dry brushwood lying about here and there—the “scrunch” worked off her disgust a little. Once, after jumping on the top of a small raked-up heap, she stood still and laughed at herself.

“What a baby I am! I need never laugh at poor Josey’s ‘tantrums’ again,” she said to herself. “But the truth is that man has thoroughly mortified me, and I can’t stand mortification. It is my thorn in the flesh.”

Just then it seemed to her that she heard a faint sound in the path behind her. It was too dark to see anything, but Mary’s heart began to beat faster, and jumping down from the heap she hurried on more quickly than before.

"I daresay it's only a rabbit," she thought; "but still all round here has a sort of haunted feeling to me."

She was glad when at last she came upon the flight of steps Mr. Cheviott had described. Running up them, the first object that met her sight was Mr. Morpeth hastening towards her.

"Miss Western! Did you get out of the window? It was frightfully rash," he exclaimed.

"I did *not* get out of the window," replied Mary, shortly. "But that I did not try to do so is no thanks to you, Mr. Morpeth."

"Why, what's the matter? I have done my very best, I can assure you," he replied, good-naturedly. "I was as quick as I could be, considering all your directions—I don't think it can be more than half-an-hour since I left you."

“Half-an-hour,” repeated Mary, indignantly. “You talk coolly of not much more than half-an-hour, but just fancy what that seemed to me. Shut up alone in that horrible room, and in the dark, too !”

“I’m very sorry, but I couldn’t help it.”

“It would not have taken *me* half-an-hour, I know,” pursued Mary, “to have run round to the front of the house and find the housekeeper.”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Morpeth, “it certainly would, if, when you had run round to the front of the house, you had *not* found the housekeeper, and had been told instead that she had had to hurry off to her master, who had arrived unexpectedly—and if you had had to explain all to Mrs. Greville, and beg her not to rouse an alarm and so on—all this in deference to the special commands of a certain young

lady, whom I mistakenly imagined I was trying to serve."

Mary felt rather ashamed of herself.

"Did you not find the housekeeper after all?" she inquired, meekly.

"Yes, Mrs. Greville managed it, but I would not let her go back through the house to let you out, as I knew you would so dislike possibly meeting that fellow—what's his name?—the man himself, I mean, whom you hate so. So I got a key; look what a queer one," holding out a quaint-looking object, which Mary could, however, hardly distinguish, till she took it in her own hands, "it opens the spring door from the outside, you see."

"But did *you* see Mr. Cheviott?" asked Mary.

"Oh! no, he stopped at his bailiff's, or somewhere, and sent on his groom to say he had come back about some business, and

would stay all night. Then off flies Mrs. Silver, or whatever her name is—and nobody thinks any more of us two unfortunate wretches.”

“Yes, I see. I understand it all now,” said Mary, “and——”

“You do, but I don’t,” interrupted Mr. Morpeth. “I want to know how you got out of the room. You could never have found the spring, after all, and in the dark too.”

Mary did not answer.

“*Did* you?” persisted her companion. “Come now, Miss Western, I do think I deserve a civil answer.”

“Well, then, I *didn’t*,” replied Mary.

“Do you call that a civil answer?” inquired Mr. Morpeth.

“No,” said Mary, half laughing, “I don’t know that I do, but——”

“But what?”

“The truth is, I don’t want to tell you how I got out of the room, and I shall be exceedingly, infinitely obliged to you if you will say no more about the affair.”

“A short time ago you said you would be exceedingly obliged, or eternally grateful, or something of the kind if I would climb out of that window and find the housekeeper.”

“And so I was—so I am,” said Mary.

“Looks like it,” observed Mr. Morpeth.

Then they walked on a few steps in silence, Mary feeling still uneasy, and somewhat conscience-smitten.

“Mr. Morpeth,” she said at last, “what are you thinking?”

“Would you really like to know?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, I was thinking that girls are all the same—very little satisfaction to be got out of any of them.”

"That means me, I suppose," said Mary, slightly nettled.

"Perhaps," replied Mr. Morpeth, coolly. "You see, Miss Western, I did think you such a particularly sensible girl."

"I dislike being considered a sensible girl more than anything you could say to me," interrupted Mary.

"There you go!" said Mr. Morpeth. "As I was saying, I thought you, till to-day, a very sensible girl—not like my sisters, who are for ever flying out about something or other—and this afternoon you have really been so very uncertain and queer-tempered——"

"I know I have," interrupted Mary again, stopping short as she spoke. "Mr. Morpeth," she went on, "we shall be meeting the others again directly. Will you be really so *very* kind as to say nothing more about this afternoon and all the

trouble I have given you? I don't think I am generally uncertain and queer-tempered, but I have really been a good deal worried and troubled lately, and—and I think if I could explain all you would say there was a little excuse for me.”

There was something very like the glistening of tears in the brown eyes; it was almost too dark to see, but the voice suggested enough to soften Mr. Morpeth's heart—far more boyish and impressionable than he would have liked to own to. A new idea struck him.

“Perhaps, after all, she has some reason for disliking that fellow,” he thought—“perhaps she knows more of him than she allows, and he has fallen in love with her—she is really awfully pretty—and is pestering her to marry him though she hates him. And her people are so poor, Mrs. Greville says——”

He turned to Mary with a change of tone.

“Miss Western,” he said, earnestly, “I promise you to say no more about it, and I’ll do my best to prevent Mrs. Greville or anyone bothering you—I really will, and I’m sorry I said you were bad-tempered.”

“Thank you, thank you very much,” said Mary, cordially.

And in a few minutes they rejoined Mrs. Greville and the Misses Morpeth, the former fortunately too much taken up with a more recent occurrence to have any thought to spare for Mary’s misadventures.

“Fancy, my dear,” she began, “what an escape you have had! Mr. Cheviott has just left us; he has been showing us the pictures himself. So *very* kind and attentive! You have only just missed him.”

“How fortunate for me!” said Mary, drily.

It was quite dark when they got back to Uxley, and the next morning Mr. Western came over as arranged, and took Mary home again the same afternoon.

It seemed to her as if she had been away weeks or months instead of days. She was glad to be home again, and yet now, if she could have deferred her return, she would. Lilius asked her no questions, but still, either in Mary's imagination or in fact, there was a tacit disappointment in her manner when she found Mary had nothing to tell.

“I was hopeful of some good result from what I had in my head,” thought Mary, “and Lily is so quick, though she had not the least idea of my doing such a wild thing. I fancy she knew by instinct that I *was* hopeful.”

“You did not hear anything of those people—the Romary people, I mean?” asked Liliās, at last, timidly, but with a sudden rush of colour into her face, which made Mary feel inclined to cry. It was about two days after she had come back.

“Yes,” she replied, “I did. I could not help hearing a good deal about them; they seem the staple subject of conversation in the neighbourhood.”

“About Captain Beverley—did you hear anything about him?” said Liliās, hastily. “Mary, you are concealing something from me—he is going to be married?”

“No, indeed. I heard nothing of that sort, Lily, I assure you. If I had, I would have told you about it at once; you know it is not my way to shirk such things—I am rather over-hasty the other way, I fear,” said Mary, with a little sigh. “And, indeed, I think I should almost have been *glad* to

hear it. It would have been a stab and done with."

"Mary, you are awfully hard," said Liliás. Her voice was low and quivering.

"Hard!" repeated Mary, with amazement in her tone. *She* hard to *Liliás*! What fearful injustice—for a moment she felt too staggered to speak—how *could* Liliás misjudge her so? What a world it must be where such near friends could make such mistakes! Had *she* ever so misjudged anyone? And, by an association of ideas which she herself could not have explained, her mind suddenly reverted to that never-to-be-forgotten scene in the Romary library, and the look on Mr. Cheviott's face which she had determined *not* to recognise as one of pain. Was it possible that in the cruel, almost insulting things she had said to him she had been influenced by some utter misjudgment of

his motives?—was it possible that they were good and pure and unselfish?—could his cousin be a bad man, from whom he was chivalrously desirous of protecting Liliás's innocence and inexperience? No, that was impossible. No man with Arthur's honest eyes *could* be a bad man, but, if not this, what other motive could Mr. Cheviott have that was not a mean and selfish one? Mary felt faint and giddy as these thoughts crowded upon her; the mere far-off suggestion of the tremendous injustice she might have done him, a suggestion born of the sharp pain of Liliás's words to herself, seemed to confuse and stun her; all her ideas lost their proportion; all the data upon which her late actions and train of thought had been based, suddenly failed her. And so swiftly had her mind travelled away from what had first started these misgivings that Liliás had spoken once or

twice, in reply to her ejaculation, before the sense of her words reached her brain.

“Mary, Mary, listen to me. Don’t look so white and miserable,” Liliás was beseeching her. “I didn’t mean hard to *me*—I don’t even exactly mean hard to *him*—I mean hard about the whole, about the way it affects me. You don’t understand, and I don’t want you to think me a sentimental fool, but can’t you understand a little? Nothing would be so frightful to me as to have my faith in him destroyed, and, don’t you see, if it could be proved to me that he had been trifling with me, deceiving me, in fact—that all the time he had been caring for some one else more than for me—don’t you see how frightful it would be for me? It would be a stab indeed, but a stab that would kill the best part of me—all my faith and trust, Mary, do you see?”

“Yes,” said Mary, sadly, “I see.”

And she saw more—she saw that, for the sake of Lillas's health and peace of mind, it was time that something should be done.

“She will grow morbid about it, and it will kill her youth and happiness, if not herself,” thought Mary. “I suppose it is on account of the isolated life we have had that this has taken such a terribly deep hold of her. For, after all, perhaps it is *possible* that, without being actually a bad, cruel man, Captain Beverley was not so much in earnest as she thought. I should call him a bad, cruel man, but, I suppose, the world would not—the world of which we know so little, as Mr. Cheviott kindly reminded me! But what can I do for Lily?”

“Mary,” said Lillas, “what are you thinking about?”

“I am thinking that something must be

done for you," said Mary. "Lilias, I think it would be better for you to go away from home for a while."

"Yes?" said Lilias. "I am almost beginning to think so myself. But I don't see how to manage it, unless I advertise as a governess. We seem to have no friends."

"By-the-by," said Mary, "that reminds me. Those Miss Morpeths at Uxley were talking about some Brookes who they think must be cousins of mother's. I meant to have asked her about them, but I forgot."

"They're not likely to be much good to us, even if they are cousins of ours," said Lilias, half bitterly. "None of mother's rich relations have troubled themselves about her."

And no more was said about the possible cousins just then.

A few days passed. Mary got back into home ways, from which even so short an absence as that of her visit to Uxley seemed to have separated her, and all was much as it had been before—much as it had been before that Sunday, now more than six months ago, when the little party of strangers had disturbed the equanimity of the Hathercourt congregation—before the still more fatal afternoon when Arthur Beverley had come over to see the Rector on business, and in his absence had stayed to tea with his wife and daughters in the Rectory drawing-room—much the same, but oh, how different! thought Liliás, wearily, as she tried her best to look as cheerful as of old—to take the same interest in daily life and its occurrences which, to a healthy mind, is never wanting, however monotonous the daily life may be. She succeeded to some extent; she made herself believe

that, at least, her trials were kept *to* herself, and allowed to shadow no other's horizon. But she was mistaken. Her mother began to hope her child was "getting over it;" her father, who had but dimly suspected that anything was wrong, felt dimly relieved to hear her laugh, and joke, and tease as usual again; Alexa and Josey had their own private confabulations on the subject, deciding that either their eldest sister was a heartless flirt, or that, "between themselves, you know," everything was satisfactorily arranged, though for some mysterious reason for a time to be kept secret, as any way it was clearly to be seen "that Lily was not in low spirits." Only Mary, ignorant as she was and professed herself to be of all such misfortunes as are involved by falling in or out of love, was undeceived.

"Lilias is trying her best, but she is

breaking her heart all the same," she said to herself. "If only I could get her away for a while among new people and new scenes, there might be a chance for her."

In the end it was kind Mrs. Greville again who came to the rescue, and that, to Mary's great relief, without any intervention of hers. Her one piece of concealment from Lilius had cost her dear; she had no wish to try again any independent action. What Mrs. Greville did or did not suspect, Mary could not tell, but had their kindly friend known all, she could not have acted with greater consideration and tact. She was going to town for a fortnight, she wrote, most unexpectedly, to consult a famous doctor about some new symptoms in her husband's chronic complaint. She was hopeful, yet fearful of the result. Should it be unfavourable, she would find it hard to "keep up" before her husband, away from home

and all her friends. Would Mrs. Western spare one of the girls to go with them and not exactly limit the time of her absence, as *in case* the doctor thought well of Mr. Greville they might go on to Hastings, or somewhere, for a month? Liliās or Mary either, would be of the greatest comfort to her, but if she might venture to say so—Mary was too sensible to be offended—she would, *if anything*, prefer Liliās. She was such a special favourite of Mr. Greville's, and it was he, of course, who was to be the one most considered just now.

“Well, girls?” said Mrs. Western, inquiringly, for there was silence when Mrs. Greville's note was first read in the conclave of three. Silence on Liliās's part of mingled relief and repugnance. On Mary's, the silence of caution, of fear lest her intense anxiety that Liliās should fall in with Mrs. Greville's proposal should injure

its own cause by impulsive advocacy.

“Well, girls?”

“I think Mary had better go,” said Lillas.

“But you see what Mrs. Greville says about preferring you,” suggested Mrs. Western, gently, with some faint, instinctive notion of what was passing in her second daughter’s heart.

“Yes, but that’s rubbish,” said Lillas, the colour rising slightly in her cheeks. “Mr. Greville likes us both. It is only that I chatter more than Mary, and, like all quiet, indolent men, he likes to be amused with the least possible trouble to himself. Mary is not so amusing, perhaps, because there is generally a large sprinkling of sense in her remarks, and even when, on rare occasions, she mixes it up with nonsense it is more fatiguing to separate the two than to take it all in

comfortably, as pure unadulterated nonsense like mine !”

“ You are certainly giving us a specimen of it just now,” said Mary, parenthetically. “ But seriously, mamma,” she went on, “ I think we should consider what Mrs. Greville says about preferring Liliás. I am speaking *partly* selfishly, for though I should have liked it well enough at another time, just now I should not like it at all. It would unsettle me altogether—I have just got all the things I want to do before the Summer, nicely arranged. Don’t be vexed with me or think me very selfish, Liliás,” for her sister was regarding her with an expression she did not quite understand.

To her surprise, Liliás, by way of answer, threw her arms round her and hugged her violently.

“ Think you selfish ! Mother, just listen

to her," she exclaimed. "Fancy me thinking Mary selfish." Then she hugged her again, and Mary *felt* there were tears in her eyes. "Selfish, indeed! No, but I wouldn't say as much for your truthfulness, you little humbug! Do you think I don't see through all your unselfish storytelling," she added, in a lower voice.

"Then don't disappoint me," whispered Mary. And when, at last, she disengaged herself from Liliás's embrace, she said, aloud, quietly indeed, but firmly enough to carry her purpose, "it is not storytelling, it is *true*. I should not, in the very least degree, enjoy leaving home just now. And, what is more, I just *won't* go, so, dear friends, you see my mind's made up."

And so it was settled, to be followed, as was inevitable with these girls when any scheme of the kind was in prospect, by a

solemn and momentous discussion as to ways and means—in other words, as to dresses and bonnets and ribbons! But Liliás brightened up wonderfully under the impetus of this discussion, and seemed, for the time, so like her old self that Mary began to take heart about her, and to hope everything from the change in prospect.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PRIMROSE LANE.

“Wee mortal wights whose lives and fortunes bee
 To common accidents still open layd,
 Are bownd with commun bond of frailtee
 To succor wretched wights. . . .”

Faery Queen.

IT was within a few days of Liliass's going. The bustle of preparation—of “doing up” the two white muslin evening dresses, the joint property of herself and Mary, but which Mary insisted on resigning to her sister; of “turning” the black silk skirt which had already done good service; and—most important

of all—the cutting out and making the one new dress which the family finances had been able to afford—all was over. Everything was ready, and only not packed because it was a pity to crush the garments prematurely. Liliás's temporary excitement, now that there was nothing more to do, was already on the wane. She was gentleness and sweetness itself, but with a look in her eyes that Mary did not like to see, and a clingingness in her manner which made both mother and sister wish that the day for her going were actually come and the parting, such as it was, fairly over.

It was a lovely afternoon—Spring was really coming, or thinking of it, any way.

“The birds are talking about their new houses, aren't they, Mary?” said little Francie, as she trotted along beside her sister. They had walked part of the way

to Withenden with Liliás and Josey, who were bent on an expedition to the one village shop in quest of some wool for their father's next winter's socks, the knitting of which was to be Liliás's "fancy work" while away from home. Mary had been glad when the idea struck Liliás, as her practical belief in the efficacy of a good long walk for low spirits of every kind was great.

"I wish I could go with you," she had said to Lily, "but some one must take Francie out, and Alexa and Josey always get into scrapes unless one of us is with them. You had better take Josey, she is always ready for a long walk, and Alexa may potter about the garden with mother, just what she likes."

"Very well," said Liliás, "but you and Francie might come part of the way with us. Josey is considerably more agreeable

out of doors than in the house, but two hours and a half of her, unalloyed, is about as much as I can stand. I am tired, Mary, horribly tired—"not in my feet," as Francie says, but in my own self; and oh, I'm so sorry to have been such a plague to you all this time—it makes me feel as if I *couldn't* go away."

Her voice was dangerously tremulous, and of all things Mary dreaded a breakdown, now at the last.

"Now, Liliass," she said, in what Liliass sometimes called her "make-up-your-mind-to-it" tone, "you are not to begin talking rubbish. Do you hear, child? If you want to please me, there's just one thing to do—go away with Mrs. Greville and try to enjoy yourself. This will be the most unselfish thing you can do; and even if you feel at first as if you couldn't enjoy yourself, it will come—you'll see if it

doesn't. Now let us set off at once, or you and Josey will not be back by tea-time."

They skirted the Balner woods in going, but coming home, Mary, not being pressed for time, yielded to Francie's entreaty that they might choose the primrose lane, thereby saving herself a good deal of future discussion, as nothing but "ocular demonstration" would convince the child that there might not be a few primroses out, "just two or three, perhaps, as it was such a werry fine day."

"But it is six weeks from now, at least, before they ever come out, Francie dear," said Mary, for the twentieth time, "they are not like little boys and girls, you see, who are there in the house all ready to come out the minute the sun shines and the fine weather comes. The primroses have all their growing to do first, and they need

the sun and the Spring rain to help them to grow, every year."

"But is them never the same primroses?" said Francie, in some perplexity. "Is them new every year—never the same?"

"No," said Mary, "they are never the same."

But as she said the words their sound struck her. "Never the same," nay indeed, say rather "ever the same," she thought. "'Pale primroses,' as pretty Perdita called them three hundred years ago! They must have looked up in our great-great-*great* grandmothers' faces just as they do in ours now—just as they will, centuries hence, smile at the Francies that will be looking for them then. What a strange world it is! Ever the same and never the same, over and over again."

"What are you thinking about, Mary? Tell me," said Francie.

“Nothing you would understand, dear,” Mary was saying, when the child interrupted her.

“Mary,” she said, “I hear such a funny noise, don’t you? It’s like something going *very* fast—oh! Mary, couldn’t it be one of the wild bulls running after us?”

Francie grew white with fear. Mary, hastily assuring her it could not be a wild bull, stood still to listen. Yes, Francie was right—there certainly was a sound to be heard of something rapidly nearing them, and the sound somehow made Mary’s heart beat faster.

“It can only be a horse,” she said, “I daresay it is nothing wrong.”

But her face and actions belied her words. There was a gate close by the spot where they stood. Mary unlatched it, and drew Francie within its shelter. Not a minute too soon—the rushing, tearing

sound grew nearer and nearer, but a turn in the lane hid the cause of it till close upon them.

Then—"Oh! Mary," cried Francie, "it's a horse that's runned away—and look, Mary, there's a lady on it. Oh! I'm sure she will be tumbled off," and Francie burst out sobbing with mingled fear, pity, and excitement.

It was too true—though it all seemed to Mary to pass in an instantaneous flash—the horse dashed past the gate—how glad Mary afterwards felt that she had placed herself and her little sister too far out of sight for their presence to have been the cause of what happened—flew down the lane till an open gate and a cart just coming out of a field seemed to bring its terror to a climax. It swerved suddenly, how or why exactly no one could tell, and the slight, swaying figure in the saddle was

seen to fall—heavily, lifelessly to the ground—but, thank Heaven, thought Mary, clear of the stirrup. There was not added to the spectacle, terrible enough as it was, the unspeakable horror of a prostrate figure dragged along the ground—of a fair face battered beyond recognition upon the stones.

No one seemed to be at hand to give any assistance—the horse continued for awhile his headlong course down the lane; then, after the manner of its kind, having done all the mischief it could, stopped short, and in a few minutes was quietly nibbling the grass as if nothing had happened.

But Mary gave little attention to the horse, her whole thoughts flew to the motionless figure lying there in a dark heap, where it had been thrown—so still, so dreadfully still—that was all that Mary could distinguish, as, overcoming the first

natural but selfish instinct which would have made her shrink away from a sight possibly of horror, certainly of sadness, she ran down the lane, closely followed by little Francie, who would not be left behind.

“Is the poor lady killed, Mary, does you think?” she said, when her sister had stooped to examine the face half hidden by the long habit skirt which had dropped over it in the fall.

“Run back, Francie. Stay over there by the gate, and be sure to tell me if you see anyone coming. No, I don’t think she’s killed, but she’s very badly hurt, I fear,” said Mary, “and, oh, Francie, I know who she is. She’s that pretty lady that came to church that Sunday—do you remember? Mr. Cheviott’s sister,” she murmured to herself. “How strange!”

Francie had already run off to her post of observation. Mary, afraid though she

was of further complicating the unknown injury by anything she might ignorantly do to help poor Alys, yet could not bear to see the fair head lying on the careless ground. Slowly and cautiously she raised it on to her own knee, supporting the girl's shoulders with one arm, while with the other she tenderly wiped away the dust and grass stains disfiguring the pallid cheek. The girl's eyes were closed, to all appearances she was still perfectly unconscious, but in the moving, carefully though it was done, a slight spasm of pain contracted her features for a moment. Mary shivered at the sight.

"It may be her spine that is injured," she thought to herself, "her arms are not broken, and I don't think her head is hurt. Oh dear, oh dear, if only some one would come! If I had some water, or some *eau de cologne*, or anything—I don't think I

shall ever again laugh at Alexa for carrying about a scent bottle in her pocket. Francie," she called, softly. Francie was beside her in a moment.

"Nobody's coming," she whispered. "Oh, Mary, couldn't I run home and fetch somebody? The horse wouldn't run after me, would it?" with a little shudder of fright.

"You good little girl," said Mary, approvingly. "No, dear, I don't think you could run home. It is too far for you to go alone. But let me see—there must be some cottage or farmhouse close to—Hilyar's cottages are quite half-a-mile off——"

"Captain Bebblerly lived near here, 'afore he wented away," suggested Francie. "I came this way to his house once."

"Of course," exclaimed Mary, in a tone of relief, "the back way to the Edge Farm

cannot be a quarter of a mile off. Look, Francie, dear, run back to the lane, and run on about as far as you can see from this gate. Then you'll see another gate on your left—the other side from this—that gate will take you into a field which you must cross, and go through a stile, and *then* you'll see Captain Beverley's"—even now she seemed to shrink a little from pronouncing the name—"Captain Beverley's house. Go in and tell the first person you meet to come as quick as he can, and bring some water. Tell him it is Miss Cheviott that is hurt, and tell him where we are. Quick, darling, as quick as ever you can."

Francie lingered for one instant.

"There won't be none dogs, will there, Mary?" she said, her voice trembling a little.

"I think not," said Mary. "And if

there are, Francie, you must ask God not to let them hurt you. That's what being brave means, dear."

She said it, feeling that all her own nerve and bravery were being called for. If only she could have run across the fields with Francie—but to sit here, able to do nothing, watching the terrible stillness of the girl's face——

It seemed hours before there came any change. At last a faint, gasping sigh reached Mary's ears—a slight, very slight quiver ran through the form she held so tenderly, and Alys Cheviott opened her eyes—opened them, alas! but to close them again with a quick consciousness of pain.

"My back," she whispered—"oh, my back! what have I done to it? Oh!"

Then she lay quiet for a minute or two, Mary not daring to move or speak—

scarcely to breathe, till again Miss Cheviott opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" she said. "What has happened? Who is holding me? Laurence, is it you? I cannot move; it hurts me so. Where is Gypsy?"

"Gypsy is eating grass very comfortably in the lane," said Mary, trying to speak in a cheerful, matter-of-fact tone. "It is I that am holding you, Miss Cheviott—I, Mary Western. Gypsy was very naughty; she threw you off, and I was just a little way behind and saw you."

"Gypsy threw me off," repeated Alys, slowly. "Oh, yes, I remember; she ran away." A little shudder ran through her. "It is my own fault. Laurence said she was too fresh for me to-day. And you are Miss Western—how strange!"

"*Mary* Western," the girl corrected.

"Yes, I know; I know your voice.

How strange it should be you! I am very thankful. How long might I not have lain here without anyone knowing? But my back—oh! Mary, what can I have done to my back?”

“I hope it is only strained, or bruised perhaps,” said Mary, very gently, touched by Miss Cheviott’s unconscious use of her first name. “I have sent to the farm—Edge Farm—your cousin’s house, you know, for help; we are close to it.”

“Oh, yes, I know. I wanted to see it, and I thought a long ride would take it out of Gypsy. Poor Arthur, how sorry he will be if I am badly hurt!”

Something in her words struck Mary. Could it be true, then, that Captain Beverley was engaged to this girl? But what a time for such speculations! Mary checked herself, with a feeling almost of horror.

“What can have become of Thwaites? My groom, I mean,” said Alys, suddenly. “He was close behind me when Gypsy started off.”

“He must have taken a wrong turn,” said Mary. “Most likely he dared not follow too close, and must have lost sight of you. I wish some one would come. Do you think I could hold you more easily any how?”

“Oh, no; no, thank you, I mean,” said Alys, nervously. “Don’t move; that’s the only thing you can do for me. Don’t move the very least, *please*, Miss Western.”

“I won’t, dear, not the very least,” said Mary, soothingly. “And she is seven miles from home,” she added to herself, in consternation.

Alys’s eyes closed again, and she grew so white that Mary feared she was going to faint.

“What *shall* I do?” she thought, almost in despair, when, to her indescribable relief, a sound of approaching footsteps made itself heard. She dared not even turn her head to see whose they were, but soon the new-comers stood before her. They were two men from the farm, one, the bailiff, the choice of whom had led to Arthur’s first introduction at the Rectory, a kindly middle-aged man, who looked down on the sad little group before him with fatherly concern.

“Shall I try to lift the young lady, do you think, miss?” he whispered to Mary, but Alys caught the words.

“No, no,” she moaned, “don’t move me. Whatever you do, don’t move me.”

It seemed to Mary that her head was beginning to wander. She glanced up at the bailiff in perplexity.

“She must be moved, miss,” he replied,

with decision, in answer to her unspoken question, "and the longer we wait the fainter-like she'll get. Not to speak of catching rheumatics from the damp, which would be making a bad job a worser, for sure."

Mary bent her face over Alys's.

"Dear Miss Cheviott—Alys," she whispered, "I fear we *must* move you."

Alys shivered, but resisted no longer.

"Hold my hand, then—all the way," she murmured, without opening her eyes.

"I can carry her quite as easy as on a shutter, and it's less moving in the end. My missus'll have the downstairs bed all ready," said the bailiff, encouragingly. "But first, miss, we brought a drop of brandy, as the Captain left, and some water. Will you please try for to get her to swallow a spoonful before we move her, poor lamb?"

With some difficulty Mary succeeded. Then came the lifting her, a terrible business, notwithstanding the infinite tenderness of the stalwart bailiff. And all along the lane, many times Mary would have thought her unconscious of all that was passing, but for the convulsive pressure of the little hand that clung to hers so helplessly.

Half-way up the lane the sad little *cortége* was reinforced by Francie, still out of breath, and with great pity shining out of her big blue eyes, and further on still by Thwaites, leading his own horse and naughty Gypsy, now perfectly subdued and serene.

“He must go for a doctor,” said Mary, at once, when she caught sight of him. “Tell him so,” she added, turning to the young farm servant who had accompanied the bailiff. “Let me see—yes, Mr.

Brandreth at Withenden is the nearest."

"That's him as we always have at the Hall," said Thwaites, catching the words; and apparently thankful to be told what to do, he gave over Gypsy to the young man's charge, and, mounting his own horse, was off in a moment.

The "downstairs bed" was ready, and clean and comfortable enough to make Mary rejoice that the accident had not happened in a still more isolated part of the country.

"You are very brave," she whispered, when at last the agony of the movement was over, and Alys, with death-white cheeks and quivering lips, was laid in the easiest position their ignorance could achieve.

A faint smile flickered over the poor girl's face.

"Am I?" she whispered. "I am so

glad. Please tell Laurence—and—Mary, kiss me, please. Somehow I have always wanted to love you both—her too—she is so pretty,” she murmured, softly. “And fancy my being in Arthur’s house like this.”

Then for a while she lay silent, and Mary’s thoughts turned to her own position. What should she do? She was most anxious to get home as soon as possible; it was already past Francie’s tea-time, and before long her mother would be getting alarmed. Besides, how more than disagreeable it would be for her to meet Mr. Cheviott again! How could she tell how he might look upon her presence beside his sister, and what she had done to help poor Alys?

She got up from her seat by the bedside, and with soft steps moved towards the door. But, faint as it was, the sound roused Alys.

“Where are you going, Miss Western?” she said. “Oh, you are not going away from me, are you? You will not leave me alone here—oh, do at least wait till the doctor comes, and hear what he says.”

Mary felt that it would be barbarous to refuse.

“No,” she replied, “I won’t go away if you would like me to stay; I will only just send a note to my mother to tell her where I am, otherwise she will wonder what has become of us. I will get Mrs. Wills to send a man with my little sister and the note to mamma.”

“Oh, yes, your little sister—I remember seeing her standing by,” said Alys, dreamily; “I am so sorry to trouble you so. How good you are! Please come and sit beside me. Couldn’t Mrs. Wills get you some tea?”

"Would *you* like some?" said Mary, eagerly catching at anything to break the weary suspense of waiting for the doctor's arrival.

"I am very thirsty—yes, I think I should," said Alys, faintly; so Mary hurried off to write her note, and bespeak some tea, though, when ready, it was hard work to get Alys to swallow it. She seemed to shrink from the slightest movement with increasing and indescribable terror.

"It will be impossible to move her to Romary," thought Mary, with dismay. "What will be done? I wonder if the groom will have the sense to fetch Mr. Cheviott as well as the doctor? I almost wish he *would* come now—it seems such a responsibility. And if only the doctor would come!"

After all, Dr. Brandreth came much

sooner than could reasonably have been expected, long as the hour and a half or so of waiting seemed to Mary, for Thwaites met him on the way to Withenden. Mary had just gone, at the doctor's request, to borrow a pair of scissors from Mrs. Wills, to cut off poor Alys's riding-habit, so as to save her all possible suffering, when, passing the open front door on her return, the sound of wheels suddenly stopping at the gate made her pause. Yes, it was Mr. Cheviott. Mary hesitated. What should she do? She had no time to decide. Mr. Cheviott was at the door before she had thoroughly taken in his arrival.

Whether he was prepared to find her there or not, she could not tell. His face certainly expressed no surprise, but then, again, it expressed nothing, and her first quick instinct of pity and concern for the terrible anxiety he must be enduring died

suddenly away. Never had she seen his face harder or colder—"more insolently arrogant," she said to herself, "as if he were indignant that accidents should happen to anyone belonging to *him* as well as to other poor human beings."

Her indignation calmed her trepidation, and she stood her ground coolly. Mr. Cheviott raised his hat. Mary bowed.

"May I ask——" he began. "I suppose," he went on, "it is here Miss Cheviott is?"

"Yes," said Mary, but not moving aside so as to let him pass. "She is here. The doctor is with her."

"But I can go in?" he exclaimed, with unmistakable eagerness and anxiety in his tone now. "She is surely not very seriously injured—not—not——"

His lips grew white, and then instantly a dark red flush rose to his brow, as if

ashamed of any signs of agitation. Mary was somewhat mollified.

"I think," she said, gently, "I had better tell her first that you have come, to prevent her being startled. She is quite conscious," she added, "and I *hope* it is nothing very serious, but the doctor has not said anything yet. There are no bones broken—it is her back she complains of."

"Her back," repeated Mr. Cheviott, the red flush fading away to a sallow whiteness—"her back! Good God, I trust not!"

"It may be only severely bruised," said Mary, finding herself, despite her determination, already assuming the rôle of comforter. "I will tell her you are here if you will wait a moment." And when, in a minute or two, Mr. Cheviott was summoned to his sister, to his astonishment it was to find her supported in Mary's arms, while

Dr. Brandreth was skilfully disentangling the wisps of muddy cloth from the poor girl's form.

"That will do—beautifully," he was saying. "Now, Miss Mary, lift her the least atom on the right side—*that* won't hurt you, my dear. Good day, Mr. Cheviott," for the first time noticing his presence. "A nice piece of work this, isn't it? Still not so bad as it might have been, by a long way."

"Laurence," said Alys, faintly, "it was all my own fault. You said Gypsy was too fresh."

"Hush, my darling. Never say any more about that part of it," said Mr. Cheviott, in tones that Mary could scarcely have believed were his.

"Kiss me, and say you forgive me, then, and I won't," entreated Alys.

He could not refuse, even though in

stooping to kiss her he could not avoid his head's brushing the sleeve of Mary's dress. But motionless as she sat, he was conscious, through the thick grey tweed, of a sort of thrill of shrinking—an instinctive withdrawal from his slightest touch.

“How that girl must hate me,” he could not help thinking, even then.

“She has been *so* good and kind,” whispered Alys. “Laurence, you will thank her, won't you?”

CHAPTER IX.

COALS OF FIRE.

BENEDICK—"Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains."

BEATRICE—"I took no more pains for those thanks than you took pains to thank me."

Much Ado about Nothing.

AN hour or so later on this eventful afternoon—or evening, rather, it was fast growing dark—a cloaked and hooded figure was to be seen hastening along the lane which was the shortest way from Hathercourt Rectory to the Edge Farm. The figure had good need to be cloaked and hooded, in the waterproof sense of the term, and goloshed too, for the beautiful

Spring day had ended in, superficially speaking, very unbeautiful rain. It came pouring down—the footpath was a mass of mud already, and before long threatened to be undistinguishable from the road. Liliās—for it was she—had begun by picking her steps, but soon gave this up in despair. It was all she could do to get on at all, laden as she was with a rather cumbersome parcel under her cloak. But her step nevertheless was light and buoyant, and her face and eyes, had there been anyone there to see them, or any light to see them by, would have told of eagerness and some excitement, instead of fatigue and depression, as, taking into consideration her seven miles' walk to Withenden and back, and her present uncomfortable surroundings, might not unreasonably have been expected.

“It is horrible of me—I don't under-

stand myself," she said, suddenly, aloud. Then she hurried on faster than before, pursuing, nevertheless, the same train of thought. "Why should I feel more buoyant and hopeful than I have done for long, just when such a terrible thing—or what may prove such a terrible thing—has happened to that poor girl? I *know* I am sorry for her—and even if I were not, I should be sorry to think how it will grieve Arthur; but yet—ah, yes, it is just the feeling of having, as it were, something to do with him again—of perhaps hearing him spoken of and of seeing the house where he was, so lately. His own house!"

She had never been inside the farmhouse. Often they had passed it in their walks with Arthur, and more than once he had tried to persuade the Rectory family to organise some sort of picnic party to his bachelor quarters; but to this Mrs.

Western had so decidedly objected that the project had never been fulfilled. So Liliás was rather in the dark, mentally as well as physically, as to the exact approach to the front door, if front door there was to a house whose three entrances were all much on a par, and in the end she hit upon the one which Mrs. Wills decidedly considered the back door. It had the advantage, however, in the present state of the weather, of being near the kitchen, so her rap was answered without delay.

“My sister is still here, is she not? Miss Western—Miss Mary Western, I mean,” she explained, in reply to Mrs. Wills’ mute look of bewildered inquiry.

“Oh, yes, miss, to be sure she is, and what we should have done without her I don’t know, and what we shall do now if she——”

She was interrupted.

“Shut that door, if you please, Mrs. Wills,” a man’s voice called out, “it sets all the other doors in the house rattling,” and from an inner room Mr. Cheviott came out to enforce his directions. He had almost shut the door in Liliass’s face before he perceived her. Then—“I beg your pardon,” he said, instinctively, but, dim as the light was, Liliass felt certain he had recognised her.

“He will think he is going to have the whole Western family down upon him,” she thought, with a smile. Then she came forward a little.

“I am Miss Western,” she said, calmly, and something in the voice, a certain cheery yet half-defiant ring, reminded her hearer of Mary—he had never come into personal contact with Liliass before. “I have come for my sister—it was too stormy for my mother to come out, but

she was getting uneasy, and my little sister could not quite explain. I hope Miss Cheviott is not seriously hurt?"

"Thank you," he replied, "we can hardly tell. Will you be so good as to come in, and I will tell your sister you are here."

Lilias came in, and depositing her parcel—bundle, rather—on the table, stood, nothing loth, beside the welcome blaze of the kitchen fire.

"How queer it is," she thought, "Mary seems quite established here! In the very heart of the enemy's camp, according to *her* opinion, at least, for she has always persisted that Mr. Cheviott's interference was to be blamed for it all. I don't think it was. Arthur would not be so fond of him if he were that sort of man, and besides," with an unconscious slight elevation of her pretty head, "*he* is not

the sort of man to be interfered with."

Then she glanced round the kitchen—a pleasantly old-fashioned farmhouse kitchen, not unpicturesque, as seen in the flickering firelight, alternately lighting up and hiding the dark rafters and the quaintly-carved oak settle, where for so many years old John Birley had sat and smoked his pipe, and mused on the fallen fortunes of his house. The last of the Hathercourt Beverleys, Mawde's great-great-grandson, to have come down to the bent, blue-stockinged old farmer, whose figure, hobbling into church, Liliás had been familiar with ever since she could remember.

"Fancy Mawde Beverley, beautiful and refined as she almost certainly was—the Maynes of Southcote are said to have been very beautiful—*fancy* her looking forward along the centuries to that old rough man as one of her great-grandchild-

ren!" thought Liliás. "If she could have looked forward to *Arthur*—what a difference! Life is a very queer thing—queer and sad too, I suppose. Still I am glad to be alive, and to take my chance of the goods and bads."

Unconsciously to herself, hope was reasserting itself in Liliás's heart; she could not have spoken or felt thus a few days previously.

Her soliloquy was soon interrupted.

"Lily!" exclaimed a voice behind her, and turning round, Liliás saw Mary entering the kitchen. "I could hardly believe Mr. Cheviott when he said you were here," Mary went on. "And all alone, too! Lily, I do believe he thinks us all half mad!" She gave a little laugh, but checked it suddenly.

Liliás looked at her in surprise.

"Why should he?" she said, quickly.

“I don’t see anything particularly mad in my coming down to look after you. I am your elder sister. Mother could not come. I don’t think you are quite fair on that man, Mary.”

“Long may you think so,” said Mary, sarcastically.

Lilias’s face flushed.

“Mary,” she said, nervously, “you don’t mean that—that there is anything indelicate in my coming here, to this house? It did not strike me so, or——”

“Indelicate!—no, of course not. It is very, very good of you to have come,” said Mary, warmly; “only, you see, I was so astonished.”

“But what were you intending?—what were you going to do?” said Lilias. “You can’t stay here all night without clothes, and you sent no message. We didn’t know what to think.”

"No," said Mary, "I was just beginning to wonder what I *should* do. At first, you see, I was so taken up about that poor girl, I could think of nothing else."

"But she is not badly hurt," interrupted Lillas; "you were laughing a minute ago; you don't seem in bad spirits."

"I don't know," said Mary, her voice saddening. "I think I was laughing out of a sort of nervousness. I really do not know whether she is much hurt or not, and the doctor either would not or could not say. I suppose to-morrow will show. But, Lillas, what am I to do? She cannot bear the idea of my leaving her."

"Has she no maid with her?" asked Lillas.

"Yes, but she is a mere girl who has not been long with her. And the old housekeeper, Mrs. Golding," continued Mary, with a curious tone in her voice,

“has sprained her ankle or something and cannot leave Romary. It would seem almost barbarous for me to leave her—Alys—Miss Cheviott, I mean—to-night, any way.”

“Don’t, then; there is no objection to your staying under the circumstances. Why do you look so unhappy about it?” said Liliás. “Is it all your dislike to her brother?”

“No,” said Mary, with some hesitation, “I don’t think that would affect me one way or the other, and *as* her brother, he is some degrees less odious than I could have expected. No, my feeling is, *under the circumstances*, Liliás, an intense dislike to putting them—him, I should say, in a position of obligation to us. It is like forcing him to be civil to us.”

“And why shouldn’t he be?” said Liliás,

"it is much better than forcing him to be *uncivil* to us, any way."

"I don't know that it is," said Mary, smiling faintly. "I can't altogether explain my feeling, but it is most uncomfortable altogether. He hates my staying as much as I do, and yet I can't do a cruel thing. Why, I stayed up three nights in Bevan's cottage when Jessie broke her leg without a second thought!"

"Of course you did," said Lillas, "and that's the right way to put it. Forget all about her being Mr. Cheviott's sister, and just think of doing a kind thing. Mary, it's very queer, but somehow it seems as if my troubles had, in a sense, done you more harm than me. Your sympathy for me has made you morbid."

"Perhaps so," replied Mary. "And I daresay you are right. But all the same,"

she added, "I am not fond of 'coals of fire;' there always seems to me something mean in heaping them on."

"But suppose you have no choice between that and letting your enemy hunger?" asked Liliás. "But 'enemy' and 'coals of fire'—what absurdly strong expressions—only you *will* have it poor Mr. Cheviott is the cause of it all."

"Poor Mr. Cheviott!" repeated Mary.

"I must be going," said Liliás. "George is coming to meet me; he was to start just half-an-hour after me, so I cannot miss him, and I don't want your friend to offer to see me home, so good night, dear. You'll find all you want in that bundle, and a good deal you won't want, for mother would put in all manner of things she thought might be useful for Miss Cheviott—from cotton-wool to a hop

pillow, and no doubt you have got all you want from Romary."

"No," said Mary, "that maid has no sense, and forgot nearly everything she should have remembered. I am very glad of your olla podrida, Lily. Good night, and thank you."

They kissed each other, and Liliás went out again into the rain and the darkness. Mary came back again into the kitchen, wishing, "dreadfully," as the children say, that she could have gone with her sister. She stood by the fire feeling dull and lonely, and, to tell the truth, though the Rectory was only a mile away, rather homesick! She was tired, too, which state of things has more to do with our moods of depression than we, in youth any way, take into sufficient account.

"I must go back to Miss Cheviott," she said to herself; "how I do hope the doctor

will think her better to-morrow. I may as well see what Lily has brought. How kind poor mother is !”

She was turning to examine the bundle when the half-closed door was pushed open and Mr. Cheviott came in.

“My sister seems to be falling asleep,” he said. “Perhaps it will be as well if we leave her for a little. I promised her you would go back in half-an-hour, and in the meantime—why, has your sister gone, and alone?”

“My brother was to meet her, thank you,” said Mary.

“And you? Can you—are you really going to stay with Alys all night?”

“Yes,” replied Mary. “My sister is going to explain to my mother.”

“It is exceedingly kind of you,” said Mr. Cheviott; “but really—I feel ashamed.”

“You need not feel so,” said Mary,

quietly. "I have—well not *often*, perhaps, but certainly several times—done far more for the poor people about here, and would do so again at any moment for *any* one in trouble."

Mr. Cheviott was silent. Then his glance happening to fall on a basket standing unopened on a side table he started and crossed the room to where it stood.

"I am forgetting," he said; and then, taking a small knife out of his pocket, he proceeded to cut the strings which fastened it, and to lift out its contents. It had all been a pious fiction of Alys's about fancying she would go to sleep better if left alone. She had been making herself unhappy about Mary's having had nothing to eat all the evening, and a basket of provisions having been sent from Romary by Mrs. Golding, she had begged her brother to do the honours of the farm-

house by unpacking them for Miss Western's benefit. She was full, too, of a secret wish that somehow or other a better understanding might be brought about between her brother and this girl to whom from the first she had felt so strongly attracted.

"They are both so good," said Alys to herself, as she lay, far from sleeping, alas! poor girl, on Mrs. Wills's best bed. "Laurence, of course, I do believe to be the noblest man in the world, except for his prejudices, and Mary, I can *feel*, is as good as gold. Why should they dislike each other so? For, though she tries to hide it from me, I can see that she dislikes him quite as much as he does her. And I am almost sure it was she whom I saw the other day coming down our avenue and crying. What can it all be? There is something I don't know about—that I'm sure of."

Then her thoughts took another flight.

"I wish Laurence would marry," she said to herself. "I wish he would marry just such a girl as Mary Western. How nice it would be for me! Or—supposing I don't get better from this accident—supposing I get worse and die—how dreadfully lonely Laurence will be! Poor Laurence—" and Alys's eyes filled with tears at the very thought.

In the meantime Mr. Cheviott was unpacking the basket, and handily enough, as Mary, watching him with some curiosity, was forced to allow. All sorts of good things made their appearance—a cold ham, two chickens, a packet of tea, fine bread, wine, &c., &c. Mr. Cheviott looked about him in perplexity.

"Are there no dishes of any kind to be had, I wonder?" he said at last. "I don't like to disturb Mrs. Wills—she is giving

her husband his supper in the back kitchen, I see. Poor people, we have put them about quite enough already."

Mary could no longer stand aloof. She had felt half inclined to be nettled by Mr. Cheviott's calm manner of ignoring what she could not but own to herself had been, in its inference at least, a rude speech.

"He still feels he is under an obligation to me," she had said to herself, hotly, "and therefore he won't resent anything I say. I don't agree with Liliass. I would much prefer his being uncivil, to civility of that patronising 'I couldn't-do-otherwise' kind." But the quiet good-nature with which he now turned to her for assistance appealed to something in Mary which could not but respond; the mixture of comicality too in the whole position was not without its attraction for her.

“ You are not accustomed to kitchen arrangements,” she said, smiling a little ; “ there are the dishes—lots of real willow pattern, ‘ all in a row ’—just above your head. Stay, don’t you see ? I can reach them.”

She stepped forward, put her foot lightly on a three-legged stool standing just under the shelf of dishes. But three-legged stools are cantankerous articles—they require to be treated with a certain consideration mysterious to the uninitiated. Mary, for perhaps the first time in her life, suffering from some amount of self-consciousness, gave no thought to the three-leggedness of the stool, and, light as was her spring upon it, it proved too much for its equilibrium ; the stool tilted forward, and Mary would have fallen ignominiously—perhaps worse than ignominiously, for the kitchen floor was tiled

with hard bricks—to the ground, had not Mr. Cheviott darted forward just in time to catch her. Mary was exceedingly, ridiculously annoyed—she flushed scarlet, but before she had time to do more than spring back from Mr. Cheviott's supporting arms, he said with a smile, in which, notwithstanding her mortification, Mary *could* not detect any approach to a sneer,

“*You* are not accustomed to three-legged stools, it is very evident, Miss Western. Thank you all the same for your kind intentions, however. I think *I* can reach the dishes——”

He stretched upwards and got down two or three. Mary, to hide her discomfort, was glad to help in the “dishing up” that ensued, till between them a very appetising sort of picnic supper was spread out on the table, and Mary, to tell the truth, being really hungry, did not

refuse her host's invitation to fall to. He was hungry too, notwithstanding his anxiety, and for a few minutes the repast went on in silence. Then the ludicrousness of the scene struck Mary anew, more forcibly than ever. She could not restrain a smile, and Mr. Cheviott, looking up at the moment, caught sight of it. He smiled too.

"What is it that amuses you so, Miss Western?" he asked.

"I don't know. Everything, I think," she replied.

Mr. Cheviott glanced round—then his eyes returned to the table.

"Mrs. Golding has certainly sent us provisions enough to stand a siege," he said.

"I suppose she thinks you and Miss Cheviott would starve outright without her to take care of you," said Mary.

“Just exactly what she does think,” he replied. “How do you—have you ever seen her?”

Mary wished her remark had remained unspoken, but judged it best to put a good face upon it.

“Yes,” she said, bravely, her traitorous cheeks flaming again, nevertheless; “I saw her that—that ill-starred day when I got locked up in your haunted room.”

“Ah, yes, of course,” said Mr. Cheviott. Then he hesitated. “Why do you call it ‘that ill-starred day’?” he asked, with some curiosity. “It did not do you any harm, did it? You were not so very frightened, surely?”

“I was *very* frightened—ridiculously frightened,” replied Mary; “but I suppose my nerves, though I hate to speak or think of such things as nerves, were hardly in their usual order that day. I had had

a good deal to try me. Yes, I was *very* frightened. When I heard your step approaching the door, I was nearly beside myself with fright." Here a half-smothered exclamation from Mr. Cheviott, which, had it been from anyone else, would have sounded to Mary marvellously like "poor child!" caused her to hesitate. She looked up at him—no, he was calmly filling his wine glass—she must have been mistaken. Still she hesitated, but only for a moment. Could she ever hope for such an opportunity again? Be brave, Mary, and make the most of it! "It was not on account of my fright that I so dislike the remembrance of that day," she went on, hurriedly. "It was because for the first—no, for the *second* time in my life, I felt that I had put myself into an utterly false, a most lowering position."

"How?" said Mr. Cheviott, quickly.

But there was nothing impertinent in the question—his tone of interest was too genuine.

“How?” repeated Mary; “don’t you see how? If you do not, I am increasingly thankful to be able to tell you how—to show you how horrible it was for me to be forced into such a position.” How? Why, of course, by re-entering a house where, only the day before, I had been so—so——”

Mr. Cheviott looked up, and again Mary saw the dark flush, not often seen there, rise to his forehead.

“So—so what? Do not speak hastily,” he said. “Yet perhaps it is best to know the worst. You are not going to say ‘so *insulted*.’”

“No,” said Mary, “I was not. So *misjudged*, I think, was the word on my lips.”

Mr. Cheviott smiled—a bitter, sarcastic

smile, it seemed to Mary, and perhaps she was right. It roused her to go on.

“I don’t know why I should care—the matter can have less than no interest for you, as little as your opinion of it *ought* to have for me, and yet I do care—care exceedingly that you, Mr. Cheviott, should know that I was actually *forced* into going to your house that day—that nothing but the risk of possible disloyalty to others, to another, at least, made me give in to do so. But of course I never dreamt of my going there coming to your knowledge. I may be blunt and plain-spoken, but I am not capable of such coarse, obtrusive defiance as that would have been.”

Mr. Cheviott got up from his chair and walked about for a minute or two. “She thinks her position painful,” he said to himself, “and to such a sensitive girl it must be so, I suppose. Nothing that I

could say would ever make her believe the light in which what she did really appears to me. And still less can she know how infinitely, unspeakably more painful than hers *my* position is!" Then he came back to the table, and standing opposite Mary, he said, earnestly,

"I am glad you have told me what you have felt about it," he said; "but will you believe me, Miss Western, when I tell you that your coming again to Romary *never* struck me as you think. If I thought about it at all, it was to feel sure that, as you say was the case, you had been forced to come. It was not likely, was it," he went on, with considerable bitterness in his tone, "that I should imagine you would *wish* to come in my way after—well, never mind. It is enough for me to say," his voice resuming its earnest kindness, "that nothing you could do would ever appear to

me 'coarse, or obtrusive, or defiant,' or anything but brave and true and *womanly*."

Mary was mollified in spite of herself. But her prejudices and prepossessions were far too deep-rooted to have received more than a very passing shake. And, alas! in her moment of triumph she forgot to be generous.

"I am unaccustomed to compliments," she said, coldly. "And I did not mean to ask you to *make allowance* for me. No doubt my disadvantages incline you to do so—just as you would have excused my ignorance of French the first time I spoke to you. You have misunderstood me, Mr. Cheviott. I am not *ashamed* of what I did, I only regret the ignorance of the world which made me trust to not being misunderstood."

Again Mr. Cheviott got up from his seat—this time more hastily.

"I wonder," he said, in a low, constrained voice,—“I wonder, Miss Western, if you are anxious to make me unsay some of the words I just now, in all honesty, applied to you?”

Mary did not reply.

“I have my wish,” she said to herself, “I have succeeded in forcing him to be *uncivil*.”

And when her conscience smote her a little she silenced it by the old reflection that it was Lilius's enemy with whom she was doing battle. What question could there be of hurting the feelings of the man who had done his best to break her darling's heart?—who had even *avowed* his deliberate intention of destroying the happy prospects that might have been hers?

CHAPTER X.

AN ENFORCED ARMISTICE.

“ yet he talks well ;
 But what care I for words ? yet words do well
 When he that speaks them pleases those that hear.
 but for my part
 I love him not, nor hate him not ; and yet
 I have more cause to hate him than to love him.”
As You Like It.

THERE was not, however, much appearance of enmity by the following morning between these two thus strangely thrown together. All other feelings were for the time merged in increasing anxiety about poor Alys. For the night that followed her accident was a sadly restless and

suffering one, and on the doctor's early visit the next day he detected feverish symptoms which clouded his usually cheery face.

"I can say no more as to what lasting—or, comparatively speaking, lasting—injuries she may have received," he said, in reply to Mr. Cheviott's anxious inquiries. "What we have to do at present is to try to get her over the immediate effects of the shock. An attack of fever would certainly only complicate matters, and I cannot see that she *need* have it if only we can keep her perfectly quiet."

"Then there is no chance of moving her at present?" said her brother.

"It would be most unwise—bringing on the very risk I speak of," replied Mr. Brandreth, decidedly. "She is comfortable enough—thanks to Miss Western."

"Yes," said Mr. Cheviott, "thanks to

Miss Western—but that is just the point.”

“What?”

“I cannot expect Miss Western to turn into a sick-nurse to oblige absolute strangers—people who have no sort of claim upon her,” replied Mr. Cheviott, haughtily.

Mr. Brandreth glanced at him with some curiosity.

(“I wonder how much truth there was in those reports about Captain Beverley and Lilius Western,” he said to himself.)

“She must be required at home—her time must be valuable—I cannot offer to *pay* her,” continued Mr. Cheviott, with increasing annoyance in his tone.

“They *might* be able to spare her. I believe they do keep a servant,” said Mr. Brandreth, drily.

“Nonsense, Brandreth, don’t joke about it,” said Mr. Cheviott, irritably. “You must understand what I mean—the ex-

treme annoyance of having to put oneself under such an obligation to—to——”

“To people you know exceedingly little about, it is clear,” said Mr. Brandreth, severely. “If it be a right and Christian thing to do, Mr. and Mrs. Western will spare their daughter to nurse your sister, Mr. Cheviott, just as readily as they spared her to nurse Jessie Bevan when she broke her leg.”

“So Miss Western herself told me,” observed Mr. Cheviott.

“Ah, then, you have come upon the subject?” said the doctor. “And evidently Miss Mary has rubbed his high mightiness the wrong way,” he added to himself, with an inward chuckle.

“Not exactly. I never thought of having to ask her to stay longer than to-day. All that was said was when I was thanking, or trying to thank her last night, for what

she had done, and I suppose I made a mess of it," said Mr. Cheviott, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Well, I must be going," said Mr. Brandreth, rising as he spoke.

"And what is to be done?" asked Mr. Cheviott, helplessly. "Am *I* to ask her to stay?"

"You are certainly not to send her away," replied Mr. Brandreth, greatly enjoying the situation; till, pitying Mr. Cheviott's discomfort, he added, "I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I will tell Mary she is not to leave Miss Cheviott on any account till I see her again in the afternoon, and in the meantime I will see Mrs. Western and explain it all to her, and let you know the result. I'll take it all on myself, if that will comfort you."

"You are very good," said Mr. Cheviott, fervently.

“I am sure they will spare her for a fortnight or so——”

“A fortnight!” ejaculated Alys’s brother, ruefully.

“*At least,*” said Mr. Brandreth, pitilessly, “and be thankful if the fortnight sees you out of the wood. Lilius Western is going away to-morrow, or the day after, but the mother’s quite capable of managing without her daughters for once, and it will do Miss Alexa, the only fine lady of the family, no harm to have to exert herself a little more than usual.”

“*Another* daughter,” exclaimed Mr. Cheviott. “Good Heavens! how many are there?”

“Five—and three sons. I’ve known them all ever since they were born.”

“And the eldest one—Miss Western—the one here is the second, is she not?—the eldest is going away, you say?” inquired

Mr. Cheviott, indifferently, imagining he had quite succeeded in concealing the real curiosity he felt as to this new move in the enemy's camp.

"Yes," said Mr. Brandreth, mischievously, "she is certainly going away, but where to I don't know. She is a beautiful girl—you have seen her?—I should not be surprised to hear of her marriage any day. There has been some amount of mystery about her of late—they are rather reserved people at all times—and I could not help wondering if there could be anything on the *tapis*. She seems in very good spirits, any way."

"Ah, indeed!" said Mr. Cheviott, carelessly. He hated gossip so devoutly that not even to satisfy the very great misgivings Mr. Brandreth's chatter had aroused, would he encourage it further. "Then we shall see you again in the after-

noon, and till then I am to do nothing about these arrangements?" he added, and Mr. Brandreth felt himself dismissed.

It was not afternoon, however, but very decidedly evening before the doctor paid his second visit to the farm. In the meantime he had seen Mrs. Western and explained to her the whole situation, and the result had been a note to Mary from her mother desiring her not to think of coming home that afternoon, as she had intended, and promising a visit from Lilius the following morning, when all should be discussed and settled. Concerning this note, however, Mary, not feeling it incumbent on her to do so, had made no communication to Mr. Cheviott.

"It will be time enough to tell him what my mother says if he mentions the subject," she thought. "There is not much fear of his thinking I am staying

here for the pleasure of his society.”

And in her absorbing care of poor Alys, and anxious watching for abatement in the unfavourable symptoms of the morning, she really forgot, feeling satisfied that she was acting in accordance with her parents' wishes, any personal association of annoyance in her present surroundings.

Mr. Cheviott marvelled somewhat at her calm taking-for-granted that she was to stay where she was ; but, true to his agreement with Mr. Brandreth, he said nothing. And the long, dull, rainy day passed, with no conversation between the two watchers but the matter-of-fact remarks or inquiries called forth by their occupation. By evening Alys's feverishness and excitability decreased, yielding evidently to Mary's scrupulous fulfilment of the directions left with her.

“She has fallen asleep beautifully—she

is as calm and comfortable as possible," the young nurse announced, triumphantly, to Mr. Cheviott, as she came into the kitchen where he, man-like, sat smoking by way of soothing his anxiety.

He looked up. Mary stood in the doorway, her eyes sparkling, a bright smile on her face. Just then, there could not have been two opinions about her beauty. Mr. Cheviott rose quickly.

"You are a born sick-nurse, Miss Western," he said, heartily, speaking to her for almost the first time without a shadow of constraint in his voice. But, as he uttered the words, the smile faded out of Mary's face and a white wearied look crept over it. She half made a step forward, and then caught at a chair standing close by, as if to save herself from falling.

"It's nothing," she exclaimed, recovering herself instantaneously. "Don't think

I was going to faint. I *never* do such a thing. I was only giddy for an instant. I had been stooping over Al—Miss Cheviott's bed to see if she was really asleep."

"You have been doing a great deal too much, and I can never thank you enough—the truth is, I don't know how to thank you without annoying you by my clumsiness," said Mr. Cheviott, remorsefully. But so genuinely cordial—almost boyish—was his way of speaking that Mary, even had she felt equal to warfare, could have found no cause of offence in his words.

"*Don't* thank me, then," she said, with a smile, as she sat down in the old wooden arm-chair—the most comfortable the kitchen contained—which Mr. Cheviott had drawn round for her to the side of the fire.

"I am too tired to discuss whether

your 'clumsiness' or my 'touchiness'”—a slight cloud overspread her face at the word, but only for an instant—"is to blame for my ungraciousness yesterday. If Mr. Brandreth pronounces your sister decidedly better when he comes to-morrow I shall be well thanked."

Mr. Cheviott sat down without speaking, and looked at her. He could do so for the moment without risk of offence, for Mary's eyes were fixed on the fire, which danced and crackled up the chimney with fascinating liveliness. Her face, seen now in profile and without the distracting light of her brown eyes, whiter too than its wont, struck him newly by its unusual refinement of lines and features.

"Where have those girls got their looks from?" he said to himself. "Alys was right that day that I was so cross to her in Paris, poor child; these Western girls

might, as far as looks go, be *anybody*, to speak like a dressmaker! And where, too, have they learnt such perfect self-possession and power of expressing themselves, brought up in the wilds of Hathercourt?"

"The fire looks as if it were bewitched," said Mary, glancing up at last. "When we were children we always believed when it darted and crackled and *laughed*, as it were—just as it is now—we always thought fairies were playing at hide and seek in the flames."

"Was it your own idea?" said Mr. Cheviott.

"Not mine," said Mary. "*My* fairies were all out-of-doors ones. Wood fairies were my favourites. Oh, dear! how dreadful it would be to live in a town!"

"Alys doesn't think so," observed her brother. "She often complains of the country being dreadfully dull."

“Ah, yes—in *her* case I could fancy so,” said Mary, complacently. “No brothers or sisters, and a huge empty house. To enjoy the country thoroughly, it seems to me one must be one of a good large family.”

A faint remembrance flitted across Mr. Cheviott’s mind of the half-contemptuous pity with which he had alluded to Mrs. Brabazon to the overflowing numbers in Hathercourt Rectory. *Now*, Mary’s allusion slightly nettled him.

“Alys is not quite alone in the world,” he said, stiffly, hardly realising the fact that Miss Cheviott of Romary could be an object of commiseration to one of the poor clergyman’s numerous daughters. “She has *a* brother.”

“Oh, yes, of course,” allowed Mary. “But so much older than herself, you see. I can fancy her being dull sometimes.”

Mr. Cheviott gave a slight sigh. Mary's quick conscience pricked her.

"I should not have said that," she thought. "Poor man, it would be dreadful for him just now, when she is lying ill, to think he has not made her life as happy as possible."

She leant her head on her hand and tried to think of some safe topic of conversation. These enforced *tête-à-têtes* she felt to be far the most trying part of her life at the farm. Mr. Cheviott, looking up, observed her attitude.

"You are *very* tired, I fear, Miss Western," he said, with the unconstrained kindness in his voice which so softened and mellowed its tones.

Mary roused herself at once.

"Oh, no," she said, "I am really not *very* tired. I am waiting rather anxiously for Mr. Brandreth. I thought he would

have been here before this. I must get something to do," she went on, looking round. "I wish I had asked Lillas to send a few books."

"Please don't get anything to do," said Mr. Cheviott, eagerly. "You don't know what a satisfaction it is to me to see you resting, and how glad I should be to do anything for you. Would you like—might I," he went, with a sort of timidity which made Mary smile inwardly at the idea of the unapproachable Mr. Cheviott feeling any want of assurance in addressing *her*! "might I read aloud to you? I sent home for some books to-day. Alys is rather fond of my reading aloud," he added, with a smile.

"I should like it very much indeed, thank you," said Mary. "And if—just *supposing* the sound of your voice sent me to sleep, you would not be very much offended, would you?"

Mr. Cheviott laughed—he was already looking over some magazines which Mary had not before observed on the dresser.

“What will you have?” he said. “Poetry, science, fiction? Stay, here is a good review of H.’s last novel—that I wanted to see. The German author, you know. Have you read it?”

He made the inquiry rather gingerly, being not without remembrance of the snub he had received *à propos* of the Misses Western’s knowledge of French.

“No,” said Mary, “I have not. But I have heard a good deal about it, and should like to hear more, so please read that review.”

It was a well written notice, and the subject of it one worthy of such writing. Mr. Cheviott grew interested, and so did Mary. He read well, and she listened well; till some remark of the writer’s draw-

ing forth from Mr. Cheviott an expression of disagreement, Mary took up the argument, and they were both in the midst of an amicably eager discussion when the door opened and Mr. Brandreth appeared on the threshold.

An amused smile stole over his face.

“Good news awaits me, I see,” he said, with some pomposity. “Miss Cheviott must be better, or her faithful nurse would not be chattering so merrily—eh, Miss Western?”

Mary looked up with a glimmer of fun in her eyes.

“Yes,” she said, “she *is* better. That is to say, she is fast asleep, and has been for two hours. She is sleeping as quietly as a baby, quite differently from last night, and, as far as I could judge before she fell asleep, the feverish symptoms had subsided wonderfully.”

Mr. Brandreth rubbed his hands and came nearer the fire, where Mr. Cheviott, having risen from his chair, was standing in an attitude of some slight constraint.

"I expected you earlier," he said, in a low voice *not* intended for Mary's quick ears, which, as might naturally be expected, it reached with marvellous celerity.

"Ah, yes—sorry to have disappointed you," said Mr. Brandreth, still rubbing his hands, but by this time with less energy and more enjoyment, as they gradually thawed in front of the blazing fire. "I could not help it, however, and my mind felt more at ease about things here after I had seen Mrs. Western. But I am sorry to have kept you here waiting for me all day, Mr. Cheviott. It must be very tiresome for you."

"I did not intend returning to Romary to-day," said Mr. Cheviott, speaking now

in his ordinary voice. "Of course it would have been impossible."

"I don't know that," replied Mr. Brandreth. "There is not much that you can do for your sister, and it must be dreadfully wearisome work for you hanging about here all day, particularly in the evenings," he added, in a tone of special commiseration, "when you cannot even get out for a stroll."

Mary glanced up quickly.

"How I wish he would go back to Romary!" she had been thinking to herself while Mr. Brandreth was speaking. "I would not mind staying here at all, in that case."

But something indefinable in Mr. Brandreth's voice just now roused her suspicions. Was he laughing at Mr. Cheviott? If so, he was, in a sense, laughing at her too. Mary began to feel

rather indignant. Liliás was right; there was a touch of coarseness about Mr. Brandreth notwithstanding his real goodness and kindness, which hitherto had always prevailed with Mary to take his friendly bantering in good part. Something, she knew not what, she was on the verge of replying, when Mr. Cheviott anticipated her.

“The *evenings*?” he said, simply, yet with a sort of dignity not lost upon either of his hearers—“this evening, at least, has been anything but wearisome, as Miss Western has kindly allowed me to read to her, and I fortunately lighted upon an article which interested us both. I may ride over to Romary to-morrow to see if I am wanted for anything; but I could not feel content to leave this, with Alys still in so critical a state. I have not been *very* troublesome, I hope, have I,

Miss Western?" he added, turning to Mary with a smile. There was not a shade of constraint in his manner now, yet no "Clara Vere de Vere" could have desired to be addressed with more absolute deference and respect.

For the first time Mary experienced a sensation of real friendliness towards her host for the time being. Hitherto her most cordial feeling with regard to him had been a sort of pity—a slightly pleasurable consciousness of meriting his gratitude; and in such one-sided sentiments, no root of actual *friendliness*—of which the "give and take" element is the very essence—could exist. Now, for the first time, a flash of something like gratitude to him, of quick appreciation of his instinctive chivalry, lent a softness to her voice and a light to her eyes which Mr. Cheviott, without taking credit to himself for the

change, was agreeably conscious of, as she replied, gravely,

“You have been very considerate indeed, Mr. Cheviott. And it seems to me that till your sister is decidedly better, it would not be well for you to go away.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Cheviott, simply, while in his own mind Mr. Brandreth whistled. How the wind lay was beginning to puzzle him.

“You saw mamma?” said Mary, interrogatively, turning to Mr. Brandreth. “I had a note from her this afternoon, telling me not to go home to-day, and that you would see me again.”

Mr. Cheviott heard her with some surprise. This, then, supplied the key of her quietly remaining at the farm all day with no talk of quitting her post. What a more and more interestingly unusual study this girl's character was becoming to him!

So brave, yet so shrinkingly sensitive, so wise, yet so unsophisticated, so self-reliant and coolly determined, yet yielding in an instant to the slightest expression of parental authority !

“ Yes,” said Mr. Brandreth, oracularly, “ I saw your mamma, Miss Mary, and explained the whole to her. Her views of the situation, as I felt sure would be the case, entirely coincide with mine. She will not hear of your leaving Miss Cheviott at any risk to her, for I fully explained that your remaining might do what we doctors seldom are called in time enough for—it may *save* your patient an illness instead of curing her of one. The greatest triumph of the two, in my opinion ! Furthermore, your mother desires you not to worry about things at home. Miss Alexa and Master Josephine ” (reverting to a very thread-bare joke on poor Josey’s hobble-

dehoyism) “are developing undreamt of capabilities—Josey was very nearly packing herself into your sister’s box in her anxiety to take your place as her assistant—yes, you are not to worry about things at home, and—let me see—oh, yes, you are to take good care of yourself and not get knocked up, and—and—Miss Liliás will be here in the morning and tell you all that has happened since you left home—let me see, how many hours ago?”

Mary laughed cordially. This kind of banter she could take in the best part. And she really was glad to hear all about home. How well she could fancy poor Josey’s ineffectual attempts at helping Liliás to pack, and Liliás’s good-humoured despair at the results!—it seemed ages since she had seen them all.

“Then I am to wait here till further orders,” said Mary, “and those orders, in

the first place, I suppose, will be yours, Mr. Brandreth?"

"Probably," the doctor replied.

"And I? Whose orders am I to be under?" inquired Mr. Cheviott.

"Miss Western's," said Mr. Brandreth. "In my absence Miss Western is commander-in-chief."

But his little pleasantry fell harmless this time. Mr. Cheviott and Mary only smiled. And then Mary took the doctor into the next room to see unconscious Alys sleeping, as her friend had said, as sweetly as a baby.

CHAPTER XI.

PLEDGED.

“Love, when ’tis true, needs not the aid
Of sighs, nor oaths, to make it known.”

SIR C. SEDLEY.

“**T**O-MORROW ” was a fine day at last. And Lilius was up betimes. It was the day before that of her leaving home, and, notwithstanding the great preliminary preparations, there were still innumerable last packings to do, arrangements to be made, and directions given—all complicated by Mary’s absence. Then there was Mary to see, and not wishing to be hurried in the long talk with her,

without which Liliás felt it would really be impossible to start on her journey, she set off pretty early for the farm.

It was a great bore certainly, as Josey expressed it, that Mary should be away just at this particular juncture. Liliás missed her at every turn, and felt far from happy at leaving her mother without either of her "capable" daughters at hand, especially as Mr. Brandreth had plainly given Mrs. Western to understand that Mary's stay at The Edge, if it were to do real and lasting good, might have to be prolonged over two or three weeks.

"That poor girl will not know how she is till she gets over the first shock of her accident," he had said; "and if, as I much fear, there is any actual injury, she may be thrown back into a brain fever if there is no sensible, cheerful person beside her

to help her over the first brunt of such a discovery."

"But do you think her *badly* hurt—crippled, perhaps, for life?" Liliás had asked, with infinite sympathy in her face. "What a fate!" she was saying to herself, "far better, in *my* opinion, to have been killed outright than to live to be an object of pity, and even, perhaps, shrinking, on the part of others. Fancy such a thing befalling me, and my being afraid of Arthur's ever seeing me again!"

She gave an involuntary shiver as she made her inquiry of Mr. Brandreth, who looked surprised.

"Why, Miss Liliás," he said, "you've not half your sister's nerve! What have you been doing to yourself, you don't look half so strong and vigorous as you used to."

"That is why she is going away," said

her mother, quietly. "She has not been well lately. But tell us about poor Miss Cheviott, please."

"I do not think she will be crippled for life—nothing so bad as that—but she will probably have to lie and rest for a long time. The great point is to get her well over the first of it, and that is why I am so anxious for Mary to stay."

And so it had been decided, and somehow, in spite of her regret at its happening just at this time, Lillas could not bring herself to feel altogether distressed at Mary's remaining at the farm; and though she did not exactly express this to her sister, Mary did not remain unconscious of it.

"I wish I were not going away, then it would be all right," she said, when they were sitting together in the farm-house kitchen.

“I am most particularly glad you are going away,” Mary replied. “I hardly know that I could have agreed to stay here, had you not been going away.”

“Why?” asked Liliass, opening wide her blue eyes.

“Because—because—oh ! I can’t exactly put it into words,” replied Mary. “You might understand without my saying.” But seeing that Liliass still looked inquiringly, she went on : “Don’t you see—I don’t want these people—*him*, I mean” (Mr. Cheviott had ridden over to Romary),—“to think we would take advantage of this accident—this wholly fortuitous circumstance, not of their seeking, and assuredly not of ours, of my being thrown into their society, to bring about any intimacy, any possible endeavour to recall—you know whom I mean—to—to what we had begun to think might be.”

“Your powers of expressing yourself are certainly not increasing, my dear Mary,” said Lillas, with a smile, though the quick colour mounted to her cheeks. “I really do think you worry yourself quite unnecessarily about what Mr. Cheviott thinks or doesn’t think. I cannot believe, as I have always said—I cannot believe he has been to blame as much as you imagine. Don’t you like him any better now that you have seen more of him?”

“I don’t *want* to like him better,” said Mary, honestly. “He is, of course, most courteous and civil to me—more than that, he is really considerate and kind, and certainly he is a cultivated and intelligent man, and not, in some ways, so narrow-minded as might have been expected. But I don’t *want* to like him, or think better of him ; whenever I seem to be tempted to do

so it all rises before me—selfish, cold, *cruel* man, to interfere with your happiness, my Lily.”

Mary gave herself a sort of shake of indignation.

“You are a queer girl, Mary,” said Lillas, putting a hand on each of her sister’s shoulders, and looking down—Lillas was the taller of the two—deep down into her eyes—blue into brown. The brown eyes were unfathomable in their mingled expression—into the blue ones there crept slowly two or three tears. But Lillas dashed them away before they fell, and soon after the sisters kissed each other and said good-bye.

“I wonder,” said Lillas to herself, as she stood still for a moment at the juncture of the two ways home, debating whether or not she might indulge herself by choosing the pleasanter but more circuitous path

through the woods—"I wonder if anything will have happened—anything of consequence, I mean—before I see Mary again, six weeks or so hence."

An idle, childish sort of speculation, but one not without its charm for even the wiser ones among us sometimes, when the prize that would make life so perfect a thing is tantalizingly withheld from us, or, alas! when, in darker, less hopeful days, there is *no* break in the clouds about our path, and in the weariness of long-continued gloom, we would almost cry to Fate itself to help us!—Fate which, in those seasons, we dare not call God, for no way of deliverance that our human judgment can call Divine seems open to us. Will nothing *happen*?—something we dare not *wish* for, to deliver us from the ruggedness of the appointed road from which, in faint-hearted cowardice, we shrink, short-

sightedly forgetting that, to the brave and faithful, "strength as their days" shall be given.

But in no such weariness of spirit did Lillas Western "wonder" to herself; she was young and vigorous; there was a definite goal for her hopefulness; her visions of the future could take actual shape and clothing—and how much of human happiness does such an admission not involve? She "wondered" only because, notwithstanding the disappointment and trial she had to bear, life was still to her so full of joyful possibilities, of golden pictures, in the ultimate realization of which she could not as yet but believe.

"Yes," she repeated, as, deciding that a delay of ten minutes was the worst risk involved, she climbed the narrow stile into the wood—"yes, I *wonder* how things will be when dear Mary and I are together

again? Such queer things have happened already among us. Who *could* have imagined such a thing as Mary's being 'domesticated' with the Cheviotts? I wonder if Arthur Beverley will hear of it? Oh, I do, do wish I was not going away to-morrow!"

She stopped short again for a moment, and looked about her. How well she remembered the spot where she was standing! It was not far from the place where she and her sisters had met Captain Beverley that day when he had walked back with them to the Rectory. How they had all laughed and chattered!—how very long ago it seemed now! Liliás gazed all round her, and then hastened on again, and as she did so, somewhat to her surprise, far in front of her, at the end apparently of the wood alley which she was facing, she distinguished a figure ap-

proaching her. It was at some distance off when she first saw it, but the leafless branches intercepted but little of the light, which to-day was clear and undeceptive.

“It must be papa,” she said to herself, when she was able to distinguish that the figure was that of a man—“papa coming to meet me, or possibly he may be going on to see Mary at the farm.”

She hurried on eagerly, but when nearer the approaching intruder, again she suddenly relaxed her pace. Were her eyes deceiving her? Had her fancy played her false, and conjured up some extraordinary illusion to mislead her, or was it—could it be Arthur Beverley himself who was hastening towards her? Hastening?—yes, hastening so quickly that in another moment there was no possibility of any longer doubting that it was indeed he, and that he recognized her. But no smile lit up

his face as he drew near; he looked strangely pale and anxious, and a vague misgiving seized Liliás; her heart began to beat so fast that she could scarcely hear the first words he addressed to her—she hardly noticed that he did not make any attempt to shake hands with her.

“Miss Western,” he said, in a low, constrained, and yet agitated tone, “I do not know whether I am glad or sorry to meet you. I do not know whether I *dare* say I am glad to meet you.” He glanced up at her for an instant with such appeal and wistfulness in his eyes that Liliás turned her face away to prevent his seeing the quick rush of tears that *would* come. “What you must have thought of me, I cannot let myself think,” he went on, speaking more hurriedly and nervously. “But you will let me ask you something, will you not? You seem to be coming

from the farm—tell me, I implore you, have you by any chance heard how my poor cousin is? Is she still alive? She cannot—she *must* not be dead!”

His wildness startled Liliás. A rush of mingled feelings for an instant made it impossible for her to reply. What could be the meaning of it all? Why this exaggerated anxiety about Alys Cheviott, and at the same time this tone of almost abject self-blame? Liliás felt giddy, and almost sick with apprehension—was her faith about to be uprooted? her trust flung back into her face? Were Mary’s misgivings about to be realised? Was it true that Arthur, influenced by motives she could but guess at, had deserted her for his cousin?

Captain Beverley misinterpreted her silence. His face grew still paler.

“I see what you mean,” he said, excited-

ly. "She *is* dead, and you shrink from telling me. Good God, what an ending to it all!"

A new sensation seized Liliás—a strange rush of indignation against this man, so false, yet so wanting in self-control and delicacy as to parade his grief for the girl he imagined he had lost, to the girl whose heart he had gained, but to toss it aside! She turned upon him fierily.

"No," she said, "she is not dead, nor the least likely to die. I have nothing more to say to you, Captain Beverley. Be so good as to let me pass."

For he was standing right in front of her, blocking up the path. At her first words he drew a deep breath of relief and was on the point of interrupting her, but her last sentences seemed to stagger, and then to petrify him. He did not speak, he only stood and looked at her as if stupefied.

“Why are you so indignant?” he said at last. “Why should I not ask you how Alys is?”

“Why should you?” Liliás replied. “She is your own cousin. I scarcely know her by sight—we are not even acquaintances. Captain Beverley, I must again ask you to let me pass on.”

Half mechanically the young man stood aside, but as Liliás was about to pass him he again made a step forward.

“Miss Western—Liliás,” he exclaimed, “I shall go mad if you leave me like this. I had been thinking, hoping wildly and presumptuously, you may say, that, in spite of all, in spite of the frightful way appearances have been against me, you—you were still,” he dropped his voice so low that Liliás could scarcely catch the words, “still *trusting* me.”

Liliás looked up bravely.

“So I was,” she said.

“And why not ‘so I *am*’?” he said, eagerly, his fair face flushing painfully.

Lilias hesitated.

“I don’t know,” she said at last. “I cannot understand you and—and your manner to-day.”

Captain Beverley sighed deeply.

“And I—I cannot, dare not explain,” he said, sorrowfully. “Don’t misunderstand me,” he added, hastily, seeing a quick, questioning glance from Lilias at the word “dare.” “I mean I am bound for the sake of others not to explain. I have, indeed, I now see, been bound hand and foot by the folly of others almost ever since I was born! There is nothing I would not wish to explain to you, nothing that I should not be thankful for you to know—but I cannot tell it you! Was ever man placed in such a position before?” He

stopped, and appeared to be considering deeply. "Lilias," he went on, earnestly, "it seems to me that I am so placed that I must do one or other of two wrong things. I must break my pledged word, or I must behave dishonourably to you—which shall it be? Decide for me."

"Neither," said Lilias, without an instant's hesitation. "You shall not break your word, Arthur, for my sake. And you shall not behave dishonourably to me, for, whatever you do or don't do, I promise you to believe that you have done the best you could; I have trusted you, hitherto, against everybody. Shall I, may I, go on trusting you?"

Arthur looked at her—looked straight into her eyes, and that look was enough.

"Yes," he said, "you may."

There was silence for a moment or two. Then Arthur added,

“Lilias,” he said, “I have not in the past behaved unselfishly—hardly, some would say, honourably to you. But it was out of thoughtlessness and ignorance; till I knew you, I did not know myself. I had no idea how I could care for any woman, and I had ignorantly fancied I never should. I cannot explain, but I may say one thing. Should you be afraid of marrying a poor man—a really poor man?”

Lilias smiled.

“I half fancied there was something of that kind,” she said. “No,” she went on, “I should not be afraid of marrying *you* as a poor man. I have no special love for poverty in the abstract. I know too much of it. And I am no longer, you know, what people call ‘a mere girl.’ I am two-and-twenty, and have had time to become practical.”

“It looks like it,” said Arthur, smiling too.

“But my practicalness *makes* me not afraid of poverty on the other hand,” pursued Liliás. “I have seen how much happiness can co-exist with it. My only misgiving is,” she hesitated—“you would like me to speak frankly?”

“Whatever you do, I entreat you to be frank,” said Arthur, earnestly. “I don’t deserve it, I know, but Heaven knows I would be frank to you if I could.”

“I was only going to say—my people—my parents and Mary, perhaps, might be more mercenary *for* me—because they have all spoilt me, and I have been horribly selfish, and they might think me less fit for a struggling life than I believe I really am.”

“Yes, I can fancy *their* feelings for you by my own,” said Arthur, sighing. “And how I would have enjoyed enabling you to be a comfort to them—to your mother,

for instance. Lillas, I am cruelly placed."

"Poor fellow!" said Lillas, mischievously.

"Yes," said Arthur, "I am indeed. Will you now," he went on, "tell me about Alys? How is she, and where?"

Lillas told him all she knew.

"And your sister nursing her," said Arthur. "How extraordinary!"

Notwithstanding his surprise, however, Lillas could see that the idea of the thing was not unpleasing to him.

"But for that—but for Mary's being with her, you and I would not have met this morning," she said.

"You may go further and say that but for Alys's accident I should not have been here," said Arthur, while a shade fell over his sunny countenance. "It is too cold for you standing here. Let us walk on a little."

“Are you not going to the farm?” Liliask asked.

“No. Now that I have seen you I shall hurry back the way I came. You have told me all there is to hear. Poor Alys! Liliask, I *wish* I could explain to you why I felt so horribly, so unbearably anxious about her. I am *very* fond of her; but once lately when I was nearly beside myself with perplexity and misery, Laurence—her brother, you know,—to bring me to what *he* would call my senses, I suppose, said something which has haunted me ever since I heard of her accident yesterday morning. If she had been killed I should have felt as if I had killed her.”

He looked at Liliask, with a self-reproach and distress in his open boyish face which touched her greatly—the more as, now that the brightness had for the moment faded out of his countenance, she could

see how much changed he was, how thin and pale and worn he looked.

“I think I can understand—a very little,” she said, gently, “without your explaining. But you have grown morbid, Arthur. You *know* you would suffer anything yourself rather than wish injury to anyone.”

“I suppose I have grown morbid,” he said. “Morbid from want of hope, and still more from the constant horrible dread of what you must be thinking of me. I shall not know myself when I get back to C——. I may have dark fits of blaming myself for involving you in my misfortunes—but then to know that you trust me again! Surely, whatever the world might say, I have *not* done wrong, Lilies? To you, I mean?”

“You have given me back my life, and youth, and faith, and everything good,”

she replied. "Can that be doing me wrong?"

They walked on a little way in silence. Then Arthur stopped.

"I must go, I fear," he said, reluctantly. "And I suppose we must not write to each other. No, it would not be fair to you to ask it."

"I should not like to write to you without my father and mother's knowledge," said Liliás.

"No, of course not. And, as I am placed—my difficulties involve others, that is the worst of it—I do not see that I can avoid asking you not to mention what has passed to your people, *at present*. Does that make you uncomfortable?"

Liliás considered.

"No," she said, "I do not see that it alters my position. Hitherto I have gone on trusting you, without saying anything

about it to anyone. Till I met you this afternoon, and your own manner and words misled me, I have never left off trusting you, Arthur, *never*. And so I shall go on the same way. But I couldn't write to you without them all knowing. I mean I should not feel happy in doing so. Besides, it would not be very much good. You see you cannot explain things to me yet, so we could not consult together."

"Not yet," said Arthur. "But as you trust me, trust me in this. If *any* effort of mine can hasten the explanation, you shall not long be left in this position. You are doing for me what few girls would do for a man—do not think I do not know that, and believe that I shall never forget it. Two years," he went on, in a lower voice, almost as if speaking to himself, but Lilius caught the words—"two years at longest, but two years are a long time. And if I

take my fate in my own hands, there is no need for waiting two years."

"Do nothing rash or hasty," said Liliás, earnestly. "Do nothing for *my* sake that might injure you. Arthur," she exclaimed, hastily, as a new light burst upon her, and her face grew pale with anxiety—"Arthur, I am surely not to be the cause of misfortune to you? Your pledging yourself to me is surely not going to ruin you? If I thought so! Oh! Arthur, what would—what *could* I do?"

Arthur was startled. He felt that already he had all but gone too far, and Mr. Cheviott's words recurred to him. "If the girl be what you think her, would she accept you if she knew it would be to ruin you?" Recurred to him, however, but to be rejected as a plausible piece of special pleading, "Ruin him," yes, indeed, if she, the only woman he had ever cared for,

threw him over, then they *might* talk of ruining him. And were there no Liliás in the world, could he have asked Alys to marry him—Alys his little sister—now that he knew what it was to love with a man's whole love?

“Liliás,” he said, with earnestness almost approaching solemnity in his voice, “you must never say such words as those, *never*; whatever happens you are the best of life to me. And even if I had returned to find you married to some one else, my position would have remained the same. That is all I *can* say to you. No, I will do nothing rash or hasty. For your sake I will be careful and deliberate where I would not be, or might not have been so for myself.”

“Can you not tell me where you are going, or what you are doing?” said Liliás, with some hesitation.

“Oh, dear, yes! Somehow I fancied you knew. I am at C——, studying at the Agricultural College, studying hard for the first time in my life. My idea is,” he added, speaking more slowly, “to fit myself, if need be, for employment of a kind I fancy I could get on in—something like becoming agent to a property—that sort of thing.”

Lilias looked up at him with surprise and admiration. This, then, was what he had been busy about all these weary months, during which everybody had been speaking or hinting ill of him. Working hard—with what object was only too clear—to make a home for *her*, should the mysterious ill-fortune to which he alluded leave him a poor and homeless man! Lilias’s eyes filled with tears—was he *not* a man to trust?

Then at last they parted—each feeling

too deeply for words—but yet what a happy parting it was !

“ To think,” said Liliás to herself as she hurried home, “ to think how I was wondering what might happen in the next six weeks—to think what has happened in the last half-hour !”

And Arthur, all the way back to C——, his heart filled with the energy and hopefulness born of a great happiness, could not refrain from going over and over again the old ground as to whether *something* could not be done—could not the Court of Chancery be appealed to? He wished he could talk it over with Laurence—Laurence who was just as anxious as he to undo the cruel complication in which they were both placed.

“ Only then again,” thought Arthur, “ that foolish, ridiculous prejudice of his against the Westerns comes in and prevents

his helping me if he could. And to think of Mary being there as Alys's nurse ! How he will hate the obligation—— If it were not so serious for poor Alys, I really could laugh when I think of Laurence's ruffled dignity in such a position !”

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

123

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